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Promoting Success in Developmental English: Student Life Skills Courses A Mixed-Methods Case Study

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PROMOTING SUCCESS IN DEVELOPMENTAL ENGLISH:
STUDENT LIFE SKILLS COURSES

A Mixed-Methods Case Study

by

Richard Anthony Greene

A dissertation submitted to the College of Education and Human Services in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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DEDICATION

To Maxine and Raye, with love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin by saying “Thank God.”

Any important endeavor usually owes its success to the efforts of many individuals, and this dissertation is no exception. There are many to whom I owe a debt of gratitude.

First, I wish to thank Dr. Kasten. She was a source of constant inspiration and motivation, and she most definitely provided me the guidance needed to complete this dissertation. I am also indebted to Dr. Lamkin, Dr. Webb, and Dr. Beasley for the time and effort they invested in the process.

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Finally, I would like to thank Maxine, my wife, and Raye, my daughter, for the constant encouragement and support they provided to me. This dissertation is as much the result of their dedication and effort as it is mine.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was threefold: (a) to describe the impact the SLS courses had on the retention and success rates of students who were taking developmental English courses at FSCJ-Kent Campus, (b) to explain how students taking developmental English felt the SLS courses impacted them, and (c) to find out what elements of the SLS program were most and least valued by students.

In order to understand how the SLS program impacted students in the developmental English program at FSCJ-Kent Campus, I conducted a mixed methods case study using FSCJ-Kent Campus as the research site. The case study included a quantitative stage, during which I examined archival data from fall 2008 to summer 2010 to determine the impact of the SLS program on student success and retention, and a qualitative stage, during which I conducted a survey and two focus groups to get an understanding of participants' perspectives.

The evidence that the SLS program affected the success and retention rates of students in the developmental English classes at FSCJ-Kent Campus was not conclusive. However, students reported that the program was extremely beneficial to them and provided insight into why they thought the program contributed to their success. The study was significant because I was able to get a deeper understanding of students' perspectives and provide a framework for understanding those perspectives. I concluded that the SLS program was a mechanism to transition and integrate students into the institution. This study may affect the way leaders in educational institutions approach developmental English, the SLS program, and all other developmental programs.

CHAPTER I

Community colleges were created as “open-door” institutions to provide a larger segment of the population the opportunity to attend college (Smith & Bender, 2008). As a matter of fact, “All but one state (New Mexico) has statutory language stating that the community college is an open door institution; that is, open to all high school graduates and even to students who do not have a degree” (Dougherty, Reid, & Nienhusser, 2006, p. 6). The open access aspect of community colleges had caused community colleges to accept a high percentage of students who are not prepared for college-level work (Boylan, 1988; Jenkins & Boswell, 2002; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006). This occurred either because the high school curricula did not prepare students adequately to take college level courses (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003), or because students took a break after high school (Florida Department of Education [FDOE], 2005). According to Boylan (1988), educators responded to this phenomenon by providing college preparatory services, sometimes referred to as remedial courses or developmental courses, “to help underprepared students make a successful adjustment to college” (p. 3).

The problem was especially challenging because not only were students unfamiliar with course content materials; frequently, they also lacked skills essential for success in college (Di Tommaso, 2011; Levin & Calcagno, 2007; Sawma, 2000). Students, for example, often did not possess good study skills, did not understand how to manage their time, and did not know how to interact with faculty and other college

personnel. In addition, students were often unaware of procedures, processes, and resources that could assist them in being successful. Some, for instance, did not know about financial aid procedures (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2009). As a result, students had low persistence and success rates (Bailey, 2009; Barbatis, 2010; Goldrick-Rab, 2010). This phenomenon of students, especially first-time-in-college (FTIC) students, experiencing low persistence and success rates was a manifestation of the challenges educators faced transitioning and integrating students into institutions of higher education.

Though educators have not been able to solve the problem of attrition, and the retention rates have essentially remained the same during the last half-century, scholars, in addressing the challenge of transitioning and integrating students into their institutions, have worked very hard to understand the issues related to attrition and the lack of success and to provide solutions to the problem (Roueuche, 2008, personal communication; Roueuche & Roueuche, 1999). Some have maintained that the lack of success was the result of the many challenges that students face in life (e.g., Maslow, 1954). Others have viewed the lack of success as being fundamentally related to the way adults learn and were taught (e.g., Knowles, 1970). Another group of scholars have chosen to focus on what educators could do to integrate students, both academically and socially, into their institutions (e.g., Tinto, 1987, 1993). Others have focused on a combination of factors. Goldrick-Rab and Han (2011), for instance, identified academic choices in high school, family background, and sociodemographic characteristics as factors affecting the success rate of students. The result was a number of initiatives, many of which incorporated

selected concepts from the above mentioned scholars (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2005; Stuart, 2009).

One such initiative was the efforts of educators at Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) to address the issue of student success and retention. In looking at one aspect of the college that needed improvement, leaders at FSCJ (formerly Florida Community College at Jacksonville) identified the challenges that its first-time-in-college (FTIC) students faced and selected those challenges as the focus of its improvement efforts as part of the college's 2003-2008 Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP; FCCJ, 2004b). As administrators, faculty, and staff researched the issues pertaining to the lack of success in developmental education programs, their research of best practices indicated that students needed information about college processes, study skills, time management, and a number of similar topics, conveyed to them in a structured manner; and that educators at other institutions were conveying this type of information to students by means of courses designed specifically for this purpose (Green, 2009, personal communication). In Florida, these types of courses were referred to as *Student Life Skills* (SLS) courses, and data from the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) indicated that students who took such courses experienced a higher rate of success than those who did not (FDOE, 2006). College officials redesigned an existing SLS course during the 2003-2004 academic year to include material that leaders believed could affect the retention and student success rates in the developmental program and created a course that was called *SLS 1103 – Strategies for Success in College, Career, and Life* (FCCJ, 2004a; Green, 2009, personal communication). This class was offered for the first time in the

fall of 2004, and college leaders made it mandatory in the fall of 2005 that all students who tested into two developmental classes take the SLS course (FCCJ, 2005b). In fall 2009, college leaders made it mandatory that all students who tested into any developmental class take the SLS course (FSCJ, 2010a). Because of the implementation of this SLS program, FSCJ became a living laboratory where I could conduct a study to gain an in-depth understanding of the SLS program and how students felt it impacted or did not impact their success.

The purpose of this study was threefold: (a) to describe the impact the SLS courses had on the retention and success rates of students who were taking developmental courses at FSCJ, (b) to explain how students taking developmental English felt the SLS courses impacted or did not impact them, and (c) to find out what elements of the SLS program were most and least valued by students. In order to describe the impact, I examined archival data at FSCJ from fall 2008 to summer 2010. I then explained how students felt the courses affected or did not affect their success by examining the experiences students had with the SLS courses.

Statement of the Problem

A major challenge that students taking courses in developmental English have faced over the last half-century has been completing those courses successfully. In 1968, Roueche and Hurlburt noted, “In a typical California public junior college, 80 percent of entering students enrolled in remedial English, but only 20 percent of them matriculated in regular college English classes” (Roueche & Hurlburt, 1968, p. 455). Twenty years later, Mohammadi (1994), seeking to explain the retention and attrition rate at a two-year

public community college, found that the total retention rate after one year was 34.6% (1988); in addition, his research indicated that in the following three years, the rates were 31.9% (1989), 28.9% (1990), and 33.2% (1991). In 1999, the Michigan State Department of Education provided a description of the way developmental students performed in 26 of Michigan's associate degree-granting institutions and sought to answer questions such as the following: "How do developmental students perform?" and "What institutional structures, policies, or activities correlate with developmental students' success?" (Michigan State Department of Education, 1999, p. 4). According to this study, of the 1,182 students who enrolled in developmental English during or after fall 1995, 32% enrolled in and passed college-level English by fall 1998. According to *Developmental Education in Florida Community Colleges* (FDOE, 2005), 65% of all first time in college (FTIC) degree-seeking students failed at least one entry-level test. Of this percentage, 31% failed writing. Of the students who enrolled in developmental English courses within two years of testing, only 68% completed the courses within two years (FDOE, 2005).

These data indicated that not much had changed over the past half-century in the success and retention rates of students who take courses in developmental English. However, during this time, educators recognized the severity of the problem and attempted to reduce the attrition rate and increase the success rate. Scholars such as Knowles (1970) and Tinto (1987) sought to identify factors that contribute to attrition and provide measures that addressed these factors. Leaders at a number of institutions, on

their part, made the issue of developmental education a priority (Astin, 1975; Bailey et al., 2005; Brock et al., 2007).

In 2002, approximately 55% of the students at Florida State College at Jacksonville who enrolled in Introduction to Composition B (*ENC 0021*), the institution's primary developmental English course, did not complete the course successfully (FCCJ, 2002b). Thus, typically, in a class that began with 20 students, only 9 earned a grade of "A," "B," or "C." The situation at Florida State College reflected the trend nationwide. Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey (2006), in looking at data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), noted that 68% of students passed all of the developmental writing courses in which they enrolled. Nationwide, many students who were taking classes in developmental English were not completing their courses successfully.

In the meantime, institutional data at FSCJ indicated that the success rate had essentially remained the same during the prior 20 years. However, while the data indicated that the success rate was low, the data did not explain why the rates were low, and this was information that could have had a tremendous impact on decisions that were made. Having taught *ENC 0021* for over 20 years, I had over the years met quite a few students who had not completed the *ENC 0021* course they had enrolled in for a variety of reasons, both academic and non-academic. I noticed that despite their age, ethnicity, or gender, a number of my students appeared to have left for reasons related to either psychological or sociological issues in their lives. At the same time, quite a few also left because of policies that affected the manner in which the course was taught. I also came

into contact with many colleagues (faculty and administrators) who provided anecdotal evidence that illustrated their perspectives on why some students completed their courses while others did not. As a result of my experiences and observations, I became interested in gaining a deeper understanding of why some students were completing their classes in *ENC 0021* courses while others were not. I found myself wondering what factors had contributed to the success of students who had completed *ENC 0021*. At the same time, I also found myself wondering about the factors that caused students not to complete their *ENC 0021* courses. I would frequently contact students who had dropped out and ask, “What factors prevented you from being successful in your *ENC 0021* course?” The variety of answers I received made me aware of the complexity of the problem.

Therefore, I became interested when colleagues started reporting, anecdotally, that their students who were taking specific Student Life Skills courses taught by specific instructors were staying in all of their classes until the end of the courses and completing those courses successfully. This feeling turned into excitement when I found out that data from the Florida State Department of Education, in a study in which “a cohort of 36,123 Fall 1999, first-time-in-college students” was analyzed, indicated that students who took SLS classes were more likely to complete their developmental courses successfully than those who had not taken an SLS class and were more likely to persist (FDOE, 2006, p. 1). Researchers at the Community College Research Center, in a follow-up study, supported the findings of the FDOE study (Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagno, 2007). However, as I reflected on the data presented in these two studies and their implications, I came to realize that a gap in knowledge existed in the field.

Although the question of whether SLS classes had an impact on the success and retention rates of students in developmental English classes had been addressed by the 2006 FDOE study and later confirmed by Zeidenberg et al. in 2007, additional research was needed to explain why the SLS classes were having that impact on retention and student success, as this question had not been adequately addressed in the literature: Researchers had not investigated why the SLS courses were having the impact described. In 2009, researchers O'Gara, Karp, and Hughes at the Community College Research Center conducted an exploratory qualitative study wherein they sought to find out why the SLS courses were having an impact. One of their recommendations was to conduct a more in-depth study. I realized that participants in the SLS program had perspectives that were meaningful and that could assist in addressing some of the challenges that educators were dealing with in developmental English programs. If I could get insight into those perspectives, I felt that I could get a deeper understanding how and why the SLS courses had an impact on the success rates. This information could influence leaders at the institution as they develop policies regarding developmental programs at the college. Yin (2009) explained that case studies are the preferred method when investigators are dealing with *how* and *why* questions and have little control over events; therefore, I decided to conduct a case study using FSCJ-Kent Campus as the research site.

Research Questions

Specifically, this case study was guided by the following questions:

- 1) Did the SLS initiative have an impact on retention and student success rates?

- 2) What reasons do students in developmental English give for the impact or lack of impact?
- 3) What elements of the SLS course are most and least valued by students taking developmental English courses?

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because describing the impact that SLS classes had on the retention and success rates of students in developmental English classes at FSCJ and explaining why the SLS classes were having that impact led me to make a number of recommendations which can affect the way leaders in educational institutions approach developmental English and deal with students in developmental programs. The Florida Department of Education in its 2005 report *Developmental Education in Florida Community Colleges* urged “consideration for providing the SLS course to all developmental education students” (p. 14), and this study may be able to support that recommendation. Florida State College at Jacksonville, which formerly as a community college was among the top 10 community colleges in the United States in terms of its enrollment, is committed to all of its students, especially its first-time-in-college students, and the problems that educators at the institution face appear to be the same problems that educators across the nation face. As educators at Florida State College addressed the concerns of developmental students, they experimented with a number of different strategies, including providing students with the SLS course, and an in-depth explanation of participants’ experiences with SLS could be useful to them as they continue to make decision regarding the developmental programs at FSCJ as well as to leaders at other

institutions. A study conducted by the Michigan State Department of Education (1999) found that it was more common for a student either to pass all developmental courses or to pass none of them. Especially noteworthy in that study was the finding that developmental students were more likely to remain enrolled at their institutions longer. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the effects of the SLS course on success and retention in developmental courses could not only influence decision makers as they deal with the issue of retention in all developmental courses, but could also be extremely helpful to students in terms of their persistence at institutions.

Florida State College SLS

Florida State College of Jacksonville (FSCJ) had traditionally offered a number of student life skills courses to its students. Prior to 2000, while the general intent of offering such courses was to promote student success, the approach was more to provide students with a number of diverse courses that served to enrich their experiences while in college. As a result, classes such as *SLS 1101 – Dynamics of Student Success*, *SLS 1201 – Personal Development*, *SLS 1223 – Stress on Today’s Society*, and *SLS 1371 Portfolio Development for Prior Learning* were offered to students as electives.

One such course, *SLS 1101 – Dynamics of Student Success*, had been created to assist students in “adapting and coping with a college environment” (FCCJ, 2001a, p. 376). In 2000, college leaders, in response to their concern that entering students lacked certain skills essential for success in college, decided to revamp that course to better meet the needs of students. A committee of educators, business people, and other concerned parties was formed and asked to identify components that could be put into the *SLS 1101*

course to improve the course to better meet the needs of the students. The revamped course was called *SLS 1103 - Living and Learning in a Knowledge-Based Economy* and was approved by the Curriculum Committee in 2001. Its goal was “to assist students in developing skills that will help them to survive and prosper in a knowledge-based economy, adapt to and cope with a college environment” (FCCJ, 2002a, p. 387). The course was first offered on all campuses in Fall 2002 (FCCJ, 2003). Administrators then solicited feedback from students and faculty and identified additional areas of concern.

In looking at one aspect of the college that needed improvement as part of the college’s 2003-2008 Quality Enhancement Plan, leaders at FSCJ identified a number of challenges that FTIC students faced and selected those challenges as the focus of its improvement efforts (FCCJ, 2004b; Green, 2009, personal communication). As administrators, faculty, and staff researched the issues pertaining to attrition in the developmental education program, their research of best practices indicated that students needed information about college processes, study skills, time management, and a number of similar topics, conveyed to them in a structured manner (Green, 2009, personal communication). Traditionally, at FSCJ, these topics had been covered by student success personnel and by faculty members who took an interest in covering such topics. However, educators at other institutions were conveying this type of information to students by means of courses designed specifically for this purpose. Though students at Florida State College had access to a number of such SLS courses, and by the fall of 2004 had access to *SLS 1103 - Living and Learning in a Knowledge-Based Economy*, the revamped version of *SLS 1101*, leaders at the institution were still concerned that the

retention rates in the developmental courses were not being affected by those courses in significant ways. More importantly, executive leaders at the college, because of feedback received from students and faculty, were not convinced that the revamped SLS course was adequately addressing the concerns that the students were facing (Green, 2009, personal communication).

Therefore, using concepts from scholars such as Tinto (1987, 1993), college officials redesigned the course once again during the 2004-2005 academic year (Green, 2009, personal communication). This revised course was designed to teach material that leaders believed could affect the retention and student success rates in the developmental program (FCCJ, 2005a). Thus, *SLS 1101 – Dynamics of Student Success* ultimately evolved into *SLS 1103 – Strategies for Success in College, Career, and Life* (see Figure 1).

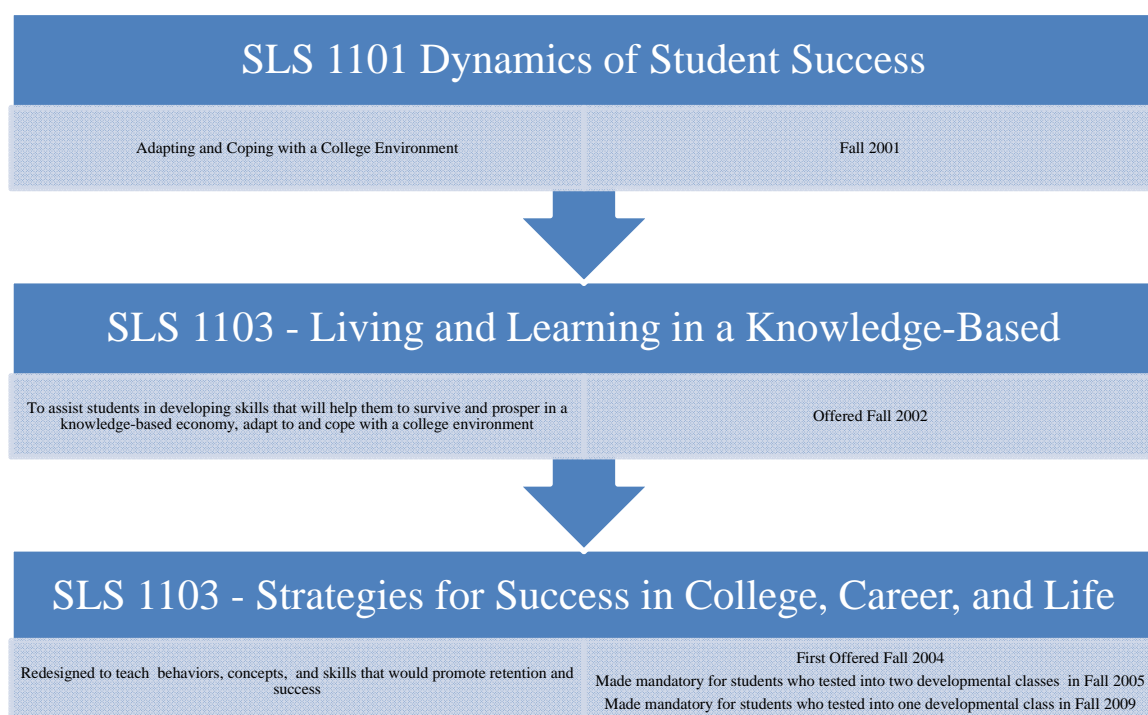


Figure 1. The evolution of SLS 1103.

This revised class was offered for the first time in the summer of 2005 (FCCJ, 2005a). Feedback from students indicated that students who took the courses were happy to have had such a course; students felt that the courses offered them immense benefits. In the fall of 2005, college leaders made it mandatory that all students who tested into two developmental classes had to take SLS (FCCJ, 2006). In Fall 2009, college leaders made it mandatory that all students who tested into any developmental class had to take SLS (FCCJ, 2010a).

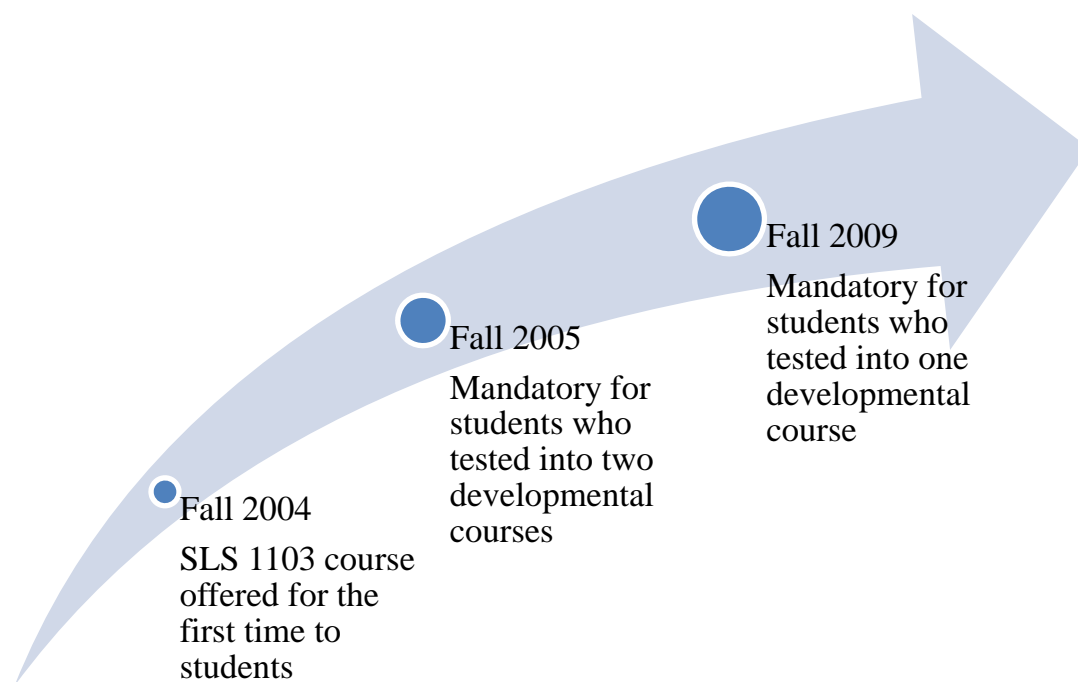


Figure 2. Sequence of SLS offerings

Methods and Procedures

I conducted a mixed methods case study using FSCJ-Kent Campus as the research site to describe and explain the impact of the SLS program on retention and student

success rates of students in the developmental English program. First, in the quantitative stage of the study, I attempted to determine the impact the SLS classes at FSCJ-Kent Campus had on the retention and success rates of students who were taking developmental English courses. In order to do so, I reviewed archival data at Florida State College from fall 2008 to summer 2010 and used that data to describe how the SLS classes affected retention and success rates across a group of developmental courses. I also investigated what students believed the impact was and why they believed the courses had that impact. I collected this data during the qualitative stage of the study by conducting a survey and two focus groups. As I was especially interested in finding out about the experiences of students, I began this phase by conducting a narrative survey of students to get their thoughts on the SLS program. I also included questions in the survey to find out students' perspectives of how their SLS courses affected their performance in their developmental English class. Next, I conducted two focus groups, one of 10 and the other of 11 *ENC 0021* students who had completed SLS courses or who were taking SLS courses. The data collected formed a case study database which I analyzed using a general analytic strategy suggested by Yin (2009) in the text *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (4th ed).

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that although FSCJ has four campuses and three centers, I elected to conduct the study at FSCJ-Kent Campus. I did so because students attending FSCJ-Kent Campus were representative of students across the college in terms of their performance on FSCJ's English exit tests; however, although I suspected that a

researcher who conducts a similar study at one of the other campuses or centers may collect essentially the same data, this may or may not be the case as different groups of students may have different experiences elsewhere depending upon the administration of the program. In addition, though the study conducted by the FDOE in 2006 examined characteristics such as race and ethnicity, full-time vs. part-time status, and socioeconomic status and, in each instance, the researchers found that the impact of the SLS classes held true for subgroups of participants as well, I elected not to look at those characteristics in this study. This was because of the lack of reliable data regarding characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. One additional limitation was the time frame that I selected for analysis during the quantitative stage of the study. For this stage, I chose to look at data from fall 2008 to summer 2010, a period of six semesters during which students at FSCJ would have taken the SLS course in its revised form; I believed that by comparing the data of students who had taken only the ENC0021 classes with the data of students who had taken both the ENC0021 and the SLS classes during that time frame, I could get a picture of the impact of the SLS program on the success and retention rates of students in the developmental English courses. I would have liked to be able to use a longer time frame; however, I could not do so because changes in the program that were in effect before and after this time period would have affected the data. Finally, additional limitations of the study included not looking at how the SLS program affected students with disabilities and students in the ESL (English as a Second Language) program.

Definitions

I would like to define the term *developmental education* as it was used in this study. Arendale (2005) pointed out, “The developmental education profession has been identified by a variety of terms: academic preparatory program, remedial education, compensatory education, learning assistance, developmental education, and access program” (p. 66). These terms were often used interchangeably, creating confusion. In addition, educators became concerned that many of these terms contained negative connotations or had otherwise become politicized (Casazza & Bauer, 2006). The term *remedial education*, for instance, gave the impression that students suffered from some ailment and had to be cured. The term also brought up the debate whether community colleges should be re-teaching what some believed should have been taught in high school (Boroch et al., 2007). Because I was aware of the political baggage that some of these words carried, I used the term *developmental education* to refer to any and all instruction that was conducted in order to make students ready to engage in learning that led to college credit. Despite the differences of opinions and interpretations, educators had generally come to accept this usage (Boylan & Bonham, 2007; Casazza & Bauer, 2006; Mulvey, 2008).

The next term that must be defined is *success*. In Florida, educators viewed students as successfully completing the *ENC 0021* developmental English course if they earned a grade of “A,” “B,” or “C” in the course. Students at FSCJ, for instance, could not take college-credit courses if they earned a “D” or “F” grade in *ENC 0021*. This is the definition that I used in this study (this is consistent with the definition used in the

2006 FDOE study). Similarly, the term *success rate* denotes the percentage of students who completed their developmental classes with a grade of A, B, or C.

The final term that I would like to define is the term *dropout*. Tinto (1987) noted, “In order to address the practical question of what institutions can do to increase student retention, we must first consider the prior question of how student dropout ought to be defined. The resolution of that question is essential to the development of effective retention programs” (p. 129). Tinto presented the opinion that while any student who leaves an institution may be regarded as a dropout from the perspective of the institution, doing so does not address the many complex reasons why students leave an institution. However, for the purposes of this study, a student was considered a dropout if he or she withdrew or did not remain in *ENC 0021* until the ending of the course.

Conclusion

I have provided in Chapter 1 background information about the study and discussed the significance of the study. As such, I indicated that increasing the success and retention rates of students was a serious challenge that educators faced when dealing with students in developmental courses. I also indicated that educators at FSCJ, using both anecdotal data and data provided by the FDOE, have concluded that students taking SLS courses are more likely to remain in their developmental English courses than students who do not take such classes. However, though researchers at the FDOE conducted an in-depth study of the impact that SLS classes had on success and retention rates (FDOE, 2006), I presented the view that a deeper understanding of the impact could be had by examining both archival data and the experiences of participants in the SLS

program at FSCJ. Therefore, I conducted a mixed methods study using FSCJ-Kent Campus as the research site to get to a richer understanding of how and why the SLS courses impacted success and retention rates at FSCJ. To describe the *how*, I examined archival data to see whether the SLS initiative had a differential impact across cohorts per semester. To explain the *why* and get a deeper understanding of the SLS program, I examined the perspectives of students by conducting a survey and two focus groups.

In Chapter 2, I will provide a review the literature on development education and a number of best practices that were proposed to assist with the transition and integration of students into developmental courses. I will also provide a description of the challenges that students who enroll in developmental English courses face. Next, I will discuss the research that indicated that SLS courses impact retention rates of students who were taking developmental courses. I will also discuss the idea that Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954) provides a context for understanding student motivation and that Knowles's (1970) theory of adult learning and Tinto's (1987) theory of retention suggest that engaging students in specific ways and teaching students specific skills may lead to increased retention; I will present the argument that these theories can serve as the contextual framework of this study as concepts taken from each may inform this study. Chapter 3 will contain a description of the methodology used in the study. I will explain why I decided to conduct a mixed methods case study, and I will also explain why I chose FSCJ-Kent Campus as the research site for this study. In addition, I will explain the plan I followed to collect and analyze data during the quantitative and qualitative stages of the study. Specifically, I will outline the processes that I followed as I

examined the archival data at FSCJ to determine the impact of the SLS program on retention and student success rates. I will explain the procedures that I followed to conduct the survey and the two focus groups. Finally, I will explain how I safeguarded the anonymity and confidentiality of participants and treated everyone involved in the study ethically.

In Chapter 4, I will present my analysis of the data. Key findings include the idea that though the evidence of whether the SLS program impacted the success and retention rates of students taking developmental English courses at FSCJ-Kent Campus proved to be inconclusive, an analysis of the narrative data indicated that participants believed that the course make a difference in not only their academic performance, but also in their lives.

Chapter 5 will contain a summary of my findings, the conclusions that I have drawn, and the recommendations that I will make for practice as well as for future research as a result of the study.

CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A major objective in creating the community college system was to provide students with access to higher education (Boylan & White, 1987; Casazza & Bauer, 2006; McCabe & Day, 1998). As a result, faculty who teach in the community college system frequently deal with students who are not prepared for the level of work that is expected at institutions of higher education. Because of this lack of preparation, processes and programs have been developed to assist students with the transition and integration into institutions of higher education. Developmental programs, also known as remedial programs, have been offered at higher educational institutions for many years as a means of assisting students with the transition into college (Boylan & White, 1987; Casazza & Bauer, 2006; McCabe & Day, 1998). However, while many educators have come to agree that such programs were beneficial to students, concerns continue to exist about the benefits of offering courses specifically identified as *developmental courses* and whether such courses are helpful to students (Boylan, 1999). Boylan, the Director of the National Center for Developmental Education (NCDE), stressed that the concern was not with providing assistance to underprepared students, but specifically with providing assistance in the form of courses. The issue was that though scholars believed that developmental courses had a positive impact on students who completed their courses (Attewell et al., 2006; Bettinger & Long, 2005; McCabe, 2000), dropout rates were high and success rates were lower than expected in developmental courses (Bailey et al., 2005;

Bailey, 2009). John Roueuche, the Director of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin, noted that, depending upon the discipline, between 40% and 60% of the students who enrolled in developmental courses dropped out of their courses (2008, private communication). Mohammadi (1994), who conducted a study of the attrition and retention rates of students, indicated that attrition rates were higher for female students, black students, part-time students, and those in the age range of 23-35 and 45-50. Bailey et al. (2005) observed that students who attended college part-time, students who were older, and students who belonged to minority groups were more likely to drop out of developmental courses. Goldrick-Rab (2010) and Di Tommaso (2011) pointed to academic, economic, and social challenges as factors influencing success. It should be noted that, because of the open access philosophy that educators at community colleges subscribe to, students who enroll in courses at these institutions frequently possess these characteristics and are affected by these factors; therefore, educators at community colleges are attempting to assist the group of students that is considered most at risk of dropping out of college.

Educators have attempted to understand and deal with this problem of attrition by looking at factors that cause students to leave and by devising strategies that address these factors (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). However, despite the efforts of administrators, faculty, and staff, the attrition rate in developmental courses continues to be high, and the course completion rates continue to be a source of concern (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Scholars have asserted that that this phenomenon exists because many of the challenges that students face are related not only to pedagogical factors, but also to psychological

and social factors (Tinto, 1987; Yorke & Longren, 2004); these are the same factors that contribute to many of the problems faced by communities at large. Despite the complexity of the problem, educators across the nation have continued to pursue initiatives designed to provide a solution (Collins, 2009; Venezia et al., 2003).

One such initiative has been offering students courses designed to teach skills necessary for success in college, at work, and in life (FDOE, 2006; Zeidenberg et al., 2007). In Florida, such courses are referred to as student life skills courses (FDOE, 2006). Data presented by the Florida Department of Education suggested that students who completed a student life skills course are more likely to remain in their developmental courses and complete those courses successfully (FDOE, 2006); researchers Zeidenberg et al. (2007) found that students who enrolled in such courses also persisted in their developmental courses.

In order to create a context for this study, I have provided a brief overview of the history of developmental education and of the challenges that students in developmental classes face. Next, I have provided summaries of two initiatives aimed at transitioning and integrating students into higher education institutions, followed by information about the impact of student life skills courses on students in developmental courses. The premise upon which this review is based is that by describing the challenges that students face, and by looking at a number of theories that explain how social and psychological factors affect students, information can be gained that may provide insight into why students who enroll in SLS classes are more likely to remain in their developmental English classes and complete those classes successfully. Knowles (1970, 1978, 1980)

and Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) developed theories that sought to explain how psychological, pedagogical, and social factors affect student success. At the same time, student success and persistence depend in large part upon whether students are at a place in life where they are capable of meeting certain needs in their lives, and a number of the challenges students face are related to this phenomenon. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954) addresses this aspect of the challenge. Therefore, I have provided in this review an overview of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954), Knowles's theory of andragogy (1980), and Tinto's theory of departure (Tinto, 1987). Collectively, these theories provide the conceptual framework for this study as elements of each appear to affect elements of the others.

History of Developmental Education

Educators have known for a long time that not all students who attempt to pursue studies at institutions of higher education are adequately prepared for such work. Educators at Harvard, America's first college founded in 1636, recognized the need for remediation when the first courses were offered (Boylan & White, 1987). Most instruction was in Latin, the "academic language" of the time, and educators found that they had to provide tutoring to help students overcome deficiencies in Latin. Boylan and White (1987) noted, "The provision of such tutorial assistance may rightly be regarded as the first remedial education effort in North America-the earliest antecedent of developmental education in American higher education" (p. 4).

According to Boylan and White (1987), another major change in providing developmental education occurred approximately 200 years later between 1824 and 1848,

the period commonly referred to as the *Jacksonian Period*. During this period, in an attempt to provide access to higher education to more people, a large number of colleges were built. The funding of many of these colleges depended upon fees collected from students. Because of this, anyone who had money, even students who were not adequately prepared for college, was allowed to enroll. Colleges continued to assist these students by providing tutoring, the model that was followed at the time; however, as the numbers of underprepared students increased, it became apparent that the tutoring model was not the most efficient model to use. In 1849, the University of Wisconsin established a college preparatory department which “provided remedial courses in reading, writing, and arithmetic to students who lacked sufficient background to succeed in more advanced courses” (Boylan & White, 1987, p. 4). Other institutions soon followed this model.

Over time, as philosophical, political, and economic trends promoted increased access, additional institutions of higher learning were established in America in an attempt to provide even more students with opportunities to pursue higher education. However, each initiative to increase access presented educators with the challenge of dealing with greater numbers of students who were not prepared to take on college level work (Boylan & White, 1987; Casazza & Bauer, 2006; McCabe & Day, 1998). Educators, on their part, responded with a number of different strategies. They attempted to assist students with the transition into their institutions by providing assistance in the form of tutoring, learning centers, and mentoring (McCabe & Day, 1998). Alas, educators quickly became aware that offering academic courses or academic programs designed specifically to help students prepare for college level work was not enough to

ensure success. Some students were not only underprepared in terms of mastery of basic content material but also lacked other skills necessary to be successful students; for instance, some students did not know how to study or how to manage their time (Bailey et al., 2004). Others who enrolled in college lacked the motivation to learn and dropped out. As other resources became available to students over time, new problems emerged. For instance, many students who enrolled in developmental courses were not graduating (Bailey et al., 2004). By the end of the 20th century, it had become clear to scholars in the developmental education field that they were dealing with a complex problem: attempting to assist students with the transition and integration into their institutions by providing developmental courses that focused only on academic content was not enough (Bailey et al., 2004)

At the same time, concerns were being raised by scholars, legislators, and others about the viability of offering developmental courses (Attewell et al., 2006; Boylan, 1999; Collins, 2010; McCabe & Day, 1998). Some felt that students and states were being charged twice for the same product as they believed that higher education institutions were essentially re-teaching what had or should have been taught in the K-12 system (Kozeracki, 2002). Adding to this concern was the issue of the high dropout rate and the apparent lack of success of students in developmental programs (Bailey et al., 2004; Kozeracki, 2002; McCabe & Day, 1998). To compound the problem, there appeared to be a lack of credible data regarding developmental programs (Collins, 2010; Levin & Calcagno, 2007; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; O'Hear & McDonald, 1995). A number of educators did not collect data about their students' performance or, if they had

such data, refused to share it with others. This situation led to the federal government proposing changes in the funding structure and implementing rules that mandated data collection. A number of states did the same (Bailey et al., 2005). Educators realized that in order to secure funding to continue to serve students in such programs and, more importantly, in order to assist their students to be successful, efforts had to be made to address the concerns. As a result, scholars made a concerted attempt to deal with the issue of retention and student success (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; O’Gara et al., 2009).

Challenges to Students

As educators have attempted to address students' retention and success, they have sought to gain a sense of the challenges facing students in developmental education programs. Although there has been much speculation about the reasons why students leave, not many studies have been conducted that examined students' perceptions of their experiences, especially in developmental English programs. One such study was conducted by the Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) Office of Institutional Research. Researchers at NVCC, in an attempt to get an understanding of the challenges facing students, conducted a series of telephone interviews in 2001 designed to find out “what respondents thought about their English testing, placement, and developmental English course work at NVCC” (NVCC, 2002, p. 1). The responses they received provided a general idea of the challenges that students at that institution typically faced. Although the study was conducted in 2001, the data continue to be relevant, as educators at other institutions report that many of their students face similar challenges. I have provided an in-depth look at some of their findings.

The responses of the students who participated in the NVCC 2002 study were grouped into the following categories: those who had satisfactory experiences, somewhat satisfactory experiences, and unsatisfactory experiences. Among those who were in the satisfactory category, a number, though satisfied, had not returned. The reasons given were quite telling. One student did not return “because she went on maternity leave,” another “because she had moved and the new commute was too far,” a third “because he had no extra time from his job demands in the military” (NVCC, 2002, p. 2) Yet another, “because he had to work for a while and save money” (NVCC, 2002, p. 6). In the somewhat satisfied category, one student did not return “because she needed to work on time management for herself” (NVCC, 2002, p. 9). One especially interesting summary was the following:

Respondent did not return because she felt college was not for her. She is not planning to return to the college for personal and financial reasons. She did mention that she was insulted and upset when the college told her that she had to take the developmental English course and was told that she did not qualify to be placed in a standard college English course. She might decide to return to the college in a few years for the vet tech program, but right now she has no desire to return. (NVCC, 2002, p. 9)

The responses in the third category were especially disturbing. One student, an older student, felt uncomfortable in class (NVCC, 2002). Another sought tutoring but could not afford to pay for it on her own. This student also felt that there were too many

students in the class seeking individualized help (NVCC, 2002). Here again, the experiences of one respondent were especially noteworthy:

Respondent did not explain why she did not return spring 2001, but said it was “rude to place people in developmental English whose first language is English.” She indicated dissatisfaction with the course she took, saying it was not very well taught, that the emphasis was upon grammar and conventional writing as opposed to creative expression, and that the instructor did not tell her she had a low grade until the day before it was too late to do anything about it. (NVCC, 2002, p. 15)

The data collected by NVCC seem to confirm Yorke and Longden’s (2004) observation that the challenges that students are facing appear to be related to psychological, social, and pedagogical factors. According to Bailey et al. (2005), “Characteristics such as academic preparedness, household income, parents’ level of education, gender, race/ethnicity, and patterns of enrollment have all been found to impact individual student outcomes” (p. i). Kim, Newton, Downey, and Benton (2010), in describing the development of an assessment tool designed to identify variables important to student success, identified the following three areas of concern: academic achievement and aptitude; situational factors such as being first generation attending college, socio-economic status, ethnicity, geographic location, personality, and interests; and personal variables, such as attitudes, self-perceptions, behaviors, problem-solving, and values. Despite the numerous challenges that students faced, Bailey et al. noted “different community colleges enrolling essentially similar types of students may have vastly different graduation rates” (p. i). This point of view was shared by leading

scholars in developmental education: intervention conducted at the institutional level could lead to differences in student outcomes (McCabe & Day, 1998; Roueuche & Roueuche, 1999; Tinto, 1987). The *Achieving the Dream* initiative, for instance, worked from the premise that “Success begets success – and every incremental milestone for every student can be positively affected by community college leaders and educators” (*Achieving the Dream: At-a-Glance*, 2010, p. 1).

Transition and Integration

Dealing with underprepared students is not a new phenomenon: this is a challenge that educators have faced since the establishment of the first institution of higher education in America, and one that has grown as access to higher education was granted to greater numbers of students over time (Boylan & White, 1987; McCabe & Day, 1998). However, the gains in increased access to higher education are such that the resources needed to deal with this challenge appear well worth the investment (Attewell et al., 2006; Boylan, 1999; McCabe & Day, 1998; Mulvey, 2008). Sadly, increased access does not mean increased success, and scholars have identified many challenges that cause this phenomenon (Collins, 2009; Venezia, Callan, Finney, Kirst, & Usdan, 2005). Fortunately, educators have striven to meet these challenges and have over the years continued to work to increase the student success rate. Traditionally, they have tried to address the concerns by providing tutoring, developmental courses, and mentoring (Boylan & White, 1987; McCabe & Day, 1998). As it became apparent that first-time-in-college-students were having problems that went beyond learning and mastering “academic” content material, educators started to incorporate support from areas that had

previously been dedicated to providing students with non-academic support. These areas were commonly known as student services areas. McCabe and Day (1998), after reviewing a number of successful programs, pointed out, “Most successful developmental programs offer a wide variety of comprehensive instructional support services, including assessment, placement, orientation, tutoring, advising, counseling, peer support, early alert programs, study skills training, and support groups” (p. 21). They noted that additional characteristics included “the integration of a variety of instructional methods” and the integration of “learning and personal development strategies and services” (McCabe & Day, 1998, p. 29). In an attempt to increase student success, educators pursued a number of initiatives designed to achieve integration of the different elements they felt were necessary to get the desired outcomes. *The Bridge Project* and *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count* were examples of two such programs designed to assist students with the transition and integration into institutions of higher education.

The Bridge Project

The Bridge Project was a six-year national study that began in 1996 (Venezia et al., 2003). Researchers focused on transitioning students from the K-12 system into higher education systems. They expressed concern that a “disconnect” existed between what was being taught in the K-12 systems and what was being expected of students in higher education institutions and cautioned, “Simply graduating from high school does not ensure that a student will be ready for college level courses” (Venezia et al., 2003, p. 7). They pointed to differences in assessments and coursework, and they noted that if

members of the K-12 educational community had a better understanding of what was expected in college, remediation rates might be lower.

Their recommendations included the following:

- Examining the relationship between the content of postsecondary education placement exams and K-12 exit-level standards and assessments to determine if more compatibility is necessary and possible.
- Reviewing postsecondary education placement exams for reliability, validity, efficacy, and the extent to which they promote teaching for understanding.
- Allowing students to take placement exams in high school so that they can prepare, academically, for college and understand college-level expectations.
- Sequencing undergraduate general education requirements so that appropriate senior-year courses are linked to postsecondary general education courses.
- Expanding successful dual or concurrent enrollment programs between high school and colleges so they include all students, not just traditionally “college-bound” students.
- Collecting, and connecting, data from all education sectors.
- Establishing data collection standards.
- Establishing federal grants to stimulate more K-16 policymaking.

(Venezia et al., 2003, p. 3)

Leaders in a number of states have sought to implement the above recommendations (Venezia et al., 2005). Educators and legislators in Florida, for example, have attempted to align the K-12 system with institutions of higher education by creating a K-20 structure with the objective of attaining a seamless transition for students from high school into college. However, challenges still remain. Venezia and Finney (2006) noted, “Many interviewees said that the scarcity of funding is one of the largest hurdles to making the K-20 system ‘seamless’” (p. 16). In summary, though the research conducted during *The Bridge Project* yielded very good recommendations, and though a number of states are trying to implement the recommendations, funding remained a serious obstacle to implementing the recommendations successfully. In an attempt to address this concern, educators have participated in initiatives such as the *Achieving the Dream Initiative*, a project designed to promote student success by providing funding for educators to work to address challenges facing students in higher education.

Achieving the Dream

The Achieving the Dream (ATD) initiative began in 2004 (*Achieving the Dream: Overview*, 2011) and was designed to assist students with the transition and integration into institutions of higher learning, especially those students who faced significant barriers to success (Collins, 2009). Its goal was to promote student success by encouraging educators to use data in making decision regarding programs designed to increase student success, i.e., by “establishing and building a culture of evidence” (Jenkins, Ellwein, Wachen, Kerrigan & Cho, 2009, p. 1). Because of ATD’s success

from 2004 to 2010, the founders incorporated it as an independent national nonprofit organization, *Achieving the Dream, Inc.*, in July 2010. According to its website (*Achieving the Dream*, 2010), ATD's approach is to use multiple levels of strategies to achieve its four outcomes, which include "institutional change, knowledge development, policy change, and public engagement" (p. 1). Educational leaders who wish to participate agree to the following five steps: (a) Commit to improving student outcomes; (b) Use data to prioritize actions; (c) Engage stakeholders to develop a plan; (d) Implement, evaluate, improve strategies; and (e) Establish a culture of continuous improvement (*Achieving the Dream: Community College Strategies*, 2011). Institutions that have participated included Patrick Henry Community College, which "reduced its attrition rate from 26% to just 5%," and Jefferson Community College, which "increased retention of new full-time students by 8% (*Achieving the Dream: Evidence of Change*, 2011, ¶2)

In summary, initiatives such as the *Achieve the Dream Initiative* have had a very positive impact in assisting educators to deal with the challenges they are facing as they attempt to assist students to successfully transition into institutions of higher education and to have successful experiences. A total of 150 institutions now participate in this initiative (*Achieving the Dream: The Network*, 2012).

Despite the complexity of transitioning and integrating students into institutions of higher learning, educators appeared to agree on the following two concepts: (a) The challenges that affect the successful transition and integration of students into institutions of higher learning arise in part because of the differences that students experience as they

transition from one system to another, and (b) educators can assist in the successful transitioning and integration of students by providing support at the institutional level that can affect student attrition and success (Tinto, 1987).

Student Life Skills

Leaders of higher education institutions face a major challenge transitioning and integrating students into their institutions. Upon entering college, students encounter a number of problems that can result in them dropping out of a certain class or out of the college altogether. According to the Florida Department of Education (FDOE, 2005), part of the problem with retention might be that students may not have the necessary skills or support structure to be successful in a college environment (FDOE, 2005). In other words, students may lack generic knowledge skills that support student success. The student life skills (SLS) courses were designed to address these concerns as such skills were packaged into the SLS courses. In these courses, students learn to set goals, plan their schedules, and to manage their time. In addition, students learn how to study, take notes, talk to instructors, and deal with problems that they may encounter. Instructors receive training in psychology, adult learning theory, and in retention theory and use this knowledge to give students insight into themselves and the educational experience.

Florida Department of Education 2006 Study

The FDOE conducted a descriptive study in 2006 “to determine if taking and successfully completing a Student Life Skills course affects a student’s academic success” (p. 1). Researchers selected a cohort of 36,123 students, tracked those students

from 1999/2000 through 2003/2004, and analyzed student outcomes. The cohort was divided into two groups: those who had completed an SLS course and those who had not. Researchers found that the SLS group was more successful than the no-SLS group: 58% of the SLS group was academically successful as compared to 41% percent of the no-SLS group, 38% percent of the SLS group were still enrolled in 2006 as compared to 24% of the no-SLS group, and 19% of the students who had taken an SLS course transferred compared to 14% of the students who had not taken an SLS course. The percentage of students who needed at least one remediation course and who achieved success after five years was 53% vs. 33%.

In looking at students who were placed into all three developmental areas, researchers found the effects of taking an SLS course even more pronounced. The academic success rates after five years were 47% for those taking SLS compared to 26% for those not taking SLS, and 40% of those students taking SLS were still enrolled as opposed to 20%. Researchers also found that the SLS courses had the most impact on African American students and Hispanic students.

The 2006 FDOE study clearly indicated that SLS courses had a positive impact on student retention and student success. However, one criticism of the study was that researchers did not control for characteristics of SLS completers and non-completers that might be related to the outcomes observed (Zeidenberg et al., 2007). In response to that concern, Zeidenberg et al. (2007), in a follow-up study, used logistic regressions to control for student characteristics and other factors that might have influenced the success of students who take such courses to examine whether SLS courses still appeared to be

related to positive outcomes (p. 2). In addition, they were also interested in tracking students who enrolled in SLS courses, as opposed to those who had completed such courses, as in the FDOE 2006 study. They were able to show that, after controlling for student characteristics, there still were positive outcomes in terms of students' earning credentials and student persistence.

Additional SLS Studies

While the FDOE (2006) and Zeidenberg et al. (2007) studies reported on the impact the courses were having on persistence and performance, neither explained in detail why the courses were having an impact on student persistence. In an attempt to address this aspect of the issue, O'Gara et al. (2009) conducted a qualitative study of student persistence in community colleges in which they examined student success courses with the goal of finding out why student life skills courses were having an impact on student persistence. Though they acknowledged that additional quantitative studies were needed "to establish a causal relationship between participation in student success courses and positive student outcomes," they wished to understand how "the particular course content lends itself to student support" (O'Gara et al., 2009, p. 198). To this end, using a process of random selection, they identified 176 students and offered each \$100 to participate in the study. Because of the low participation rate, they also used a snowball technique to recruit additional participants (p. 199). In the fall of 2005, they began the study by conducting in-depth 60-minute interviews of 44 participants. During the summer and fall, they attempted to maintain contact with the participants via telephone calls, emails, and text messages. In the fall of 2006, they were able to re-

interview 36 of the original 44 students, 30 of whom were still enrolled. In addition to student participants, a number of college personnel were also interviewed. Researchers found that the courses benefited students in the following ways: they gained information about the colleges, developed skills that could help them academically, and were able to establish important relationships. The researchers felt that these benefits reinforced each other to promote persistence (p. 204). One concern that the researchers voiced was that, given the emergent nature of their study, they were unable to determine the relative importance of various course benefits. For example, they noted, “We were unable to determine, for example, if students benefited most from the academic advising included in these courses or from other course activities” (O’Gara et al., 2009, p. 215).

All three of the studies discussed (FDOE, 2006; O’Gara et al., 2009; Zeidenberg et al., 2007) indicated that student life skills courses had a positive impact on student success and persistence. Additionally, O’Gara et al. (2009) provided insight into how institutional and personal factors affected persistence. Each group of researchers recommended that additional research be conducted. The objective of this study is to respond to their recommendation and explore the relationship between Student Life Skills courses and student success in greater detail.

Conceptual Framework

As educators have grappled with issues of retention and student success over the last half-century, a pattern emerged that indicated that the challenges students faced could be categorized in the following three areas: (a) psychological factors, (b) social factors, and (c) pedagogical factors (Goldrick-Rab & Han, 2011; O’Gara et al., 2009; Tinto, 1987;

Yorke & Longren, 2004). Over the years, scholars have responded by proposing different theories to explain how these factors affect students' behavior and performance. One challenge has been to find out what motivates students to behave the way they do. Maslow (1954), for instance, devised a theory that explained motivations behind specific types of behaviors. Knowles (1970) put together a model that explained how adults learn. Tinto (1987) developed a theory of departure that sought to explain what educators could do to address the academic and social needs of their students. Educators at FSCJ chose to address the issue of attrition and student success by incorporating strategies consistent with Maslow's, Knowles's, and Tinto's models in their student life skills program. Because of this practice, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Knowles's adult learning theory, and Tinto's theory of departure can provide the theoretical lens through which the issue can be explored: taken together, elements of these three theories may explain why students who take SLS classes are more likely to complete their courses in developmental English than those who do not take such courses. As a result, the conceptual framework of this study is derived from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Knowles's theory of adult learning, and Tinto's theory of departure.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Educators who worked with developmental students quickly noticed that psychological and social factors played an important role in whether a student elected to stay in or drop out of a course. Psychological approaches looked at these factors by focusing on students' characteristics. Yorke and Longren (2004) pointed out that this approach was more a collection of different theories than just one specific approach.

However, as I have interacted with students during the last 20 years, I have come to believe that motivation theory may very well be the most important of these theories. Levin and Koski (1998) listed *motivation* as a key component in the design of an intervention plan. Abraham Maslow (1954) described a system of motivation in his book *Motivation and Personality* in which he placed people on a pyramid according to the following structure: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness needs, esteem needs, cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, and, finally, self-actualization needs. According to his theory, physiological needs such as the need for food and water, which were at the bottom of the pyramid, had to be met before someone could progress to the position above. Once the needs at any of the levels were met, individuals were then in a position to grow.

It is difficult for students to take classes and participate in learning activities when they are concerned about their most basic needs. O'Gara et al. (2009) indicated in their study that, despite providing participants with a stipend for their participation, they had great difficulty in recruiting participants. They attributed this to the “many demands and barriers faced by students as they sought a postsecondary credential” (p. 199). Educators must be aware of the psychological and sociological challenges their students face, and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs provides a model through which such understanding may occur. However, in addition to the awareness of the psychological and sociological challenges, educators must also be familiar with the way that adult students learn. Malcolm Knowles's (1970) theory of adult learning provides a framework that can assist

in finding a solution to the problem of retention and student success in developmental English courses.

Malcolm Knowles Theory of Adult Learning

Knowles (1970) devised a system based on the teaching of adults, which he called *andragogy*. He sought to create a comprehensive theory that addressed the specific concerns adults face when they engage in learning. The core principles of Knowles's adult learning theory include the following: (a) the learner's need to know, (b) the self-concept of the learner, (c) the prior experience of the learner, (d) the learner's readiness to learn, (e) the learner's orientation to learning, and (f) the learner's motivation to learn (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005, p. 149). These principles stressed the idea that adults are self-directed, learn more effectively when their life experiences are taken into account, arrive at a stage where they experience a readiness to learn, and need to know why they are learning something (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 64-67). Knowles noted that an adult's self-concept has evolved to a point where the adult "sees himself as being able to make his own decisions and face their consequences" (Knowles, 1970, p. 40). "The point at which a person becomes an adult, psychologically," Knowles remarked, "is that point at which he perceives himself to be wholly self-directing" (Knowles, 1970, p. 40).

Knowles (1970) stated that many educators approach the teaching of adults using techniques that are better suited to teaching children. He pointed out, "Skillful adult educators have known . . . that they cannot teach adults as children have traditionally been taught. For adults are almost always voluntary learners, and they simply disappear from learning experiences that don't satisfy them" (Knowles, 1970, p. 38). The term

andragogy had previously been used in Europe to explain how adults learn (Knowles et al., 2005, pp. 58 - 60), and, using the term as a starting point, Knowles sought to organize the different elements into a comprehensive theory. Though at first he saw the two concepts as being in opposition to each other, he later noted that he did not see pedagogy and andragogy as two distinctly separate systems. In the revised edition of *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (1980), Knowles changed the subtitle from *Andragogy versus Pedagogy* to *From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (p. 69).

Developmental students frequently question their placement into developmental courses. When they do attend class, some wonder about the value of the material being taught, exhibit an unwillingness to learn materials in the way presented, and question classroom policies and procedures. In short, most students in developmental classes expect to be treated as adult learners; Knowles's principles provide the framework for treating students in developmental courses as adult learners and may assist with the transition into higher education by assisting student in meeting the challenges that adult learners face.

Understanding what motivates students to learn and how adult students learn are important to successfully transitioning students into institutions of higher learning, but may not be sufficient to ensure success. Vincent Tinto (1987) presented the perspective that while students might leave an institution for a variety of reasons, both the academic and the social setting within each institution played a major role in students' decision to withdraw or to stay at that institution. His theory of departure (1975, 1987, 1993) might

assist in informing the impact that student life skills courses have on retention and student success.

Tinto's Theory of Departure

Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) is widely regarded as one of the scholars who organized concepts related to retention into a theory (Yorke & Longden, 2004, p. 76). His approach, which was primarily sociological in nature, was based on Gennep's studies of rites of passage in communities and Durkheim's studies of suicide (Tinto, 1987, pp. 4, 91-104; Yorke & Longden, 2004). His "theory of departure" was in essence a theory that explored how interactions, academic or social, within an institution, could affect a student's decision of whether to stay or leave that institution (Tinto, 1987, pp. 86-128). He proposed an interactive model of student departure which "describes and explains the longitudinal process by which individuals come to leave institutions of higher education" (Tinto, 1987, p. 112). Tinto (1987) provided the following description of the model:

Broadly understood, it argues that individual departure from institutions can be viewed as arising out of a longitudinal process of interactions between an individual with given attributes, skills, and dispositions (intentions and commitments) and other members of the academic and social systems of the institutions. The individual's experience in those contexts, as indicated by his/her intellectual and social (personal) integration, continually modify those intentions and commitments. (pp. 112-113)

Interestingly enough, although Tinto (1987) acknowledged that psychological factors played a role in a student's decision to stay at or to leave an institution, he

downplayed those factors because he felt that focusing on those could lead to a “blame the victim” mode of thinking. As a result, one criticism of Tinto’s approach is that he did not address what institutions could do to address those factors (Yorke & Longren, 2004, p. 77).

Tinto’s model of departure is one of the most widely used models in retention, perhaps because his concept of integration provides a framework through which educators can address the many challenges that students encounter; though he acknowledged the complexity of the issue of attrition, he indicated in the model that there are behaviors that educators can engage in to assist students in meeting the challenges they face.

The issues related to retention and student success are very complex, and it is difficult to find an approach that explains all aspects of the problem. Yorke and Longden (2004) stated, “Our position is that retention and student success are influenced by a complex set of considerations which are primarily psychological and sociological, but which are in some cases influenced by matters that might be located under other disciplinary banners such as that of economics” (p 77). The student life skills course was designed to address concerns related to student success and retention, and I believe that because the course was created with specific theories in mind (Knowles, 1970; Maslow, 1954; Tinto, 1987), students who enroll in these classes are more likely to complete their developmental English courses and enroll in ENC 1101. I believe that Knowles's, Tinto's, and Maslow's theories provide a framework for understanding this complex issue (see Figure 3).

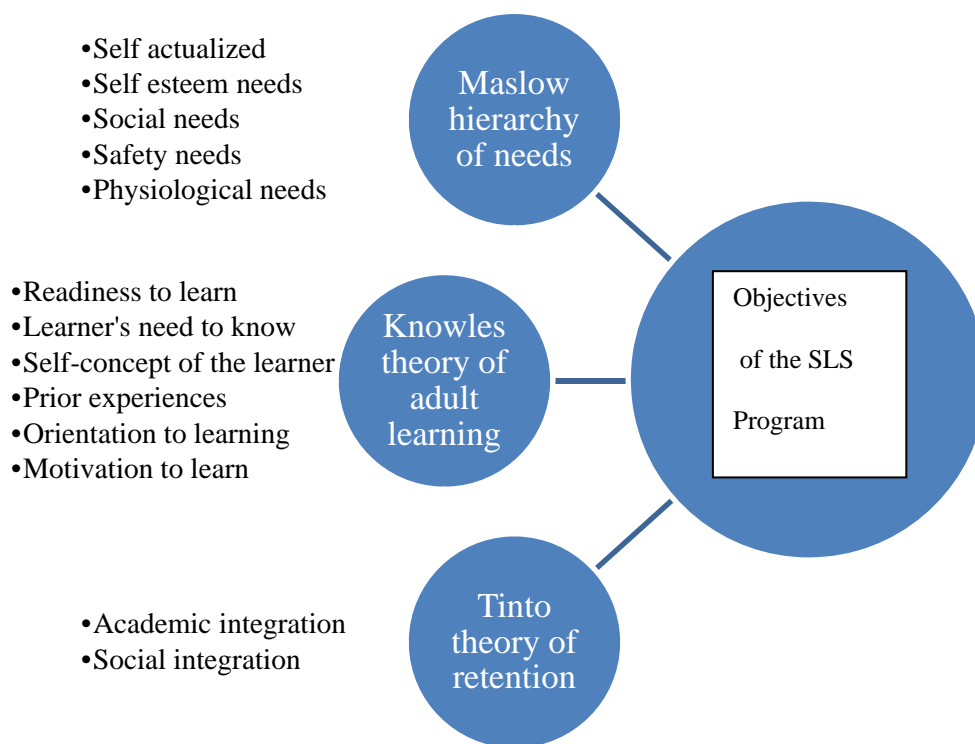


Figure 3: The objectives of the SLS program

Conclusion

I have provided in Chapter 2 an overview of the history of developmental education, an overview of the challenges that students in developmental classes face, and an overview of the issues involved in transitioning and integrating students into institutions of higher education. I have also provided information about two initiatives aimed at transitioning and integrating students into higher education institutions. In addition, I have discussed the research that indicated that SLS courses impact retention rates of students who were taking developmental courses. I have presented an overview of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954), Knowles's (1970) theory of adult learning, and Tinto's (1987) theory of retention. Collectively, these theories provided the conceptual

framework for this study as elements of each pointed to particular issues that I addressed during the narrative survey and the focus group sessions.

Chapter 3 contains a description of the methodology that I used in the study. First, I will discuss the purpose of the study and restate the research questions. Next, I will explain why I believe that I am qualified to conduct the study. Then, I will explain why I chose FSCJ as the research site for the study. Because I conducted a mixed methods descriptive case study, I will explain my rationale for doing so. In addition, I will explain my plan to collect and analyze data during the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. Specifically, I will explain the processes that I followed as I examined the archival data at FSCJ to determine the impact of the SLS program on retention and student success rates. I will explain the procedures that I followed to conduct the survey and the focus groups. Finally, I will conclude Chapter 3 by explaining the steps I took to safeguard the anonymity and confidentiality of participants and treat everyone involved in the study ethically.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

Though the issues pertaining to retention and student success in developmental courses are quite complex (Boylan, 1999; Di Tommaso, 2011; Levin & Calcagno, 2007; McCabe & Day, 1998), a number of studies have indicated that Student Life Skills (SLS) courses can make a difference in student retention rates and student success rates in developmental courses (FDOE, 2006; Zeidenberg et al., 2007). However, though the researchers at the Florida Department of Education (FDOE, 2006) and at the Community College Research Center (Zeidenberg et al., 2007) provided data that indicated that students who had taken an SLS class had fared better than students who had not taken such a class, they did not explore why the SLS courses were having an impact on retention and success rates in developmental courses. In 2009, another group of researchers at the Community College Research Center, in an attempt to gain an understanding of why SLS courses were having an impact on developmental courses, conducted an exploratory qualitative study wherein they examined institutional and personal factors that affected persistence in community colleges (O'Gara et al., 2009). These researchers concluded that the success the students in their study experienced was due to the knowledge that students gained and the relationships that students built while in the SLS classes, but they recommended that additional studies be conducted to explain the phenomenon, both in terms of what the impact was and why the courses were having that impact. The present study adds to this body of research. In this chapter, I state the

purpose of the present study, present my research questions, discuss my qualifications to conduct the study, and discuss the research site and participants. I am also providing a brief description of the mixed methods approach, the data collection procedures, the data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the impact that the SLS courses were having on the retention and success rates of students in developmental English classes at FSCJ-Kent Campus and to explain why the SLS courses were or were not having an impact. Specifically, I wished to do the following: (a) describe the impact the SLS courses had on the retention and success rates of students who were taking developmental courses at FSCJ, (b) explain how students taking developmental English felt the SLS courses impacted them, and (c) find out what elements of the SLS program were most and least valued by students. In order to meet this objective, I conducted a descriptive mixed methods case study using FSCJ at Jacksonville – Kent Campus as the research site for the study.

Research Questions

Specifically, this case study was guided by the following questions:

- 1) Did the SLS initiative have an impact on retention and student success rates?
- 2) What reasons do students in developmental English give for the impact or lack of impact?
- 3) What elements of the SLS course are most and least valued by students taking developmental English courses?

Mixed Methods Case Study

I was interested in finding out whether the SLS courses were having an impact on student retention and success rates and, if so, in examining how and why the SLS program was having an impact on students taking developmental English courses. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) noted that a mixed methods approach offered the benefits of using both the quantitative and qualitative paradigms, and Yin (2009) had suggested that a case study approach was effective when dealing with complex phenomena, especially when trying to answer how and why questions. Therefore, I decided to conduct a mixed methods case study as I believed that the data collected, after being analyzed, would lead to a deeper understanding of the issue of retention and student success.

By conducting a mixed methods case study, I was able to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches that provided the data I needed to get an in-depth understanding of (a) whether or not the SLS classes impacted the retention and success rates of students taking classes in developmental English at FSCJ, the case research site, and (b) the reasons students gave for the impact or the lack of impact. For the purposes of this study, I used a retrospective longitudinal design (Creswell, 2005) during the quantitative phase of the study, which consisted of a review of archival data from fall 2008 to summer 2010. After collecting and reviewing this archival data, I was able to describe the impact the SLS program had on retention and student success rates at FSCJ. During the qualitative phase of the study, I used a cross sectional survey design. All of the qualitative data were collected during the 2011 fall term. Creswell indicated that such

a design is used when a researcher wishes to collect data at a specific point in time to “examine current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices” (p. 356). The qualitative component of the study consisted of the following sources of evidence: a narrative survey and two focus groups. During this phase of the study, I was careful to observe what Yin (2009) referred to as “the three principles of data collection” (p. 101) when collecting data in a case study: (a) using multiple sources of evidence, (b) creating a case study database, and (c) establishing a chain of evidence. Yin pointed out that these principles “help deal with the problems of construct validity and reliability” (p. 101).

Yin (2009) stressed that “a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” (p. 114) because doing so allows the researcher to develop “converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation and corroboration” (p. 115). The multiple sources of evidence that I used consisted of the following three parts: (a) archival data (b) a survey of students, and (c) two focus groups with students (see Figure 4). I used the data collected to create a case database.

Finally, I analyzed the data in the case database, as Yin (2009) suggested, by “examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence, to draw empirically based conclusions” (p. 126). I did so by first using a preliminary analysis strategy that consisted of looking for patterns and themes, followed by the general analytic strategy of developing a case description.

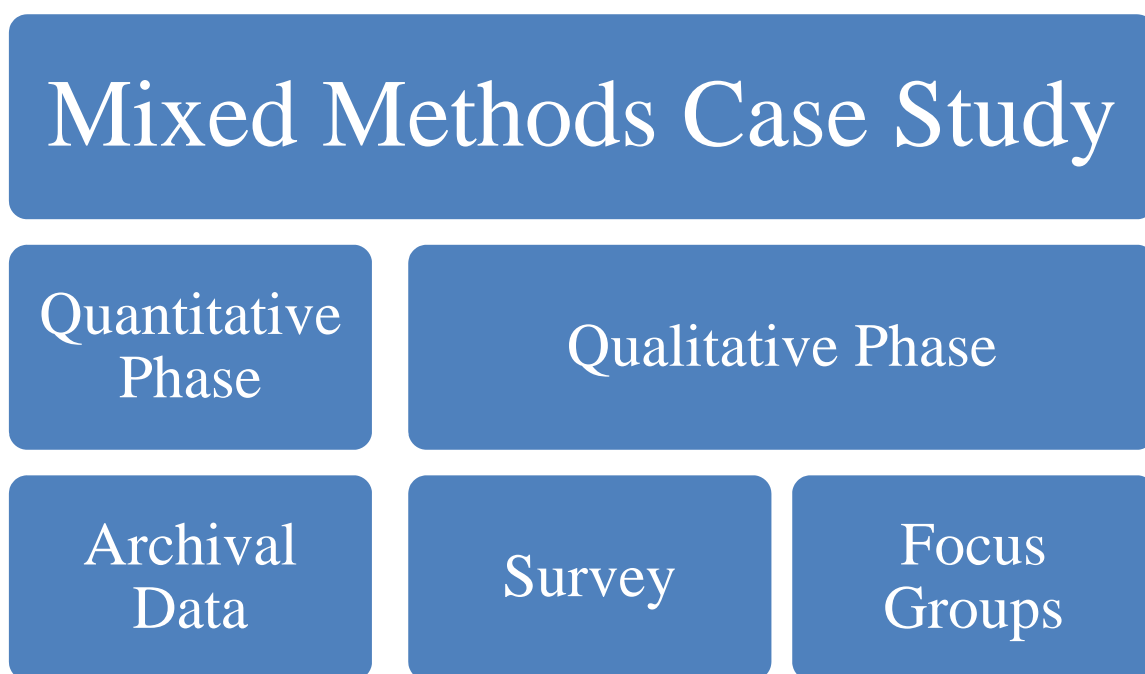


Figure 4. Mixed methods case study

Site: Florida State College at Jacksonville

Because of the focus at FSCJ on the experiences of its first-time-in-college (FTIC) students, FSCJ became a living laboratory where a researcher could study the complex phenomena of transitioning and integrating students into an institution of higher education. In 2002, FSCJ, in preparation for reaffirmation from SACS, was required to develop an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and demonstrate that the plan was a part of an ongoing planning and evaluation process (FCCJ, 2003, p. 15). The goal was to identify a particular academic area in need of college-wide attention and to develop a comprehensive plan to enhance the learning environment afforded to the students. The college responded by asking students, faculty, and staff to examine how well their programs and services were meeting the needs of their students, employers, and

the community. Based on the feedback that was received, college leaders determined that the focus of the QEP would be the improvement of retention and success rates of FTIC students who were not college ready (FCCJ, 2003, p. 15).

FCCJ, in terms of its enrollment, was the second largest community college in the United States prior to its conversion to a four-year institution. At FSCJ, institutional data indicated that large percentages of students were in need of remediation (FCCJ, 2004b, p. 5). For instance, 62% of the FTIC students who registered in fall 2001 were in need of remediation. This number changed to 64% in fall 2002. This meant that 64% of the 2,442 FTIC students registering for the fall 2002 term were in need of remediation (FCCJ, 2004b, p. 5). In addition, only 50% of the students who began a college developmental sequence of courses successfully completed the sequence (FCCJ, 2002b). Because of these data, college leaders made *developmental education* a priority (Green, personal communication, 2009). They chose *developmental practices* as the focus of the college's QEP for the 2003-2008 Accreditation Period for the SACS. The institution sought to identify the challenges that students faced and assist students in meeting and overcoming those challenges. According to the QEP 2004 Report, the following three goals were established:

- 1) Increase the fall-to-fall retention rate of college preparatory students.
- 2) Increase success rates of college preparatory students.
- 3) Increase the program completion rate of college preparatory students. (FCCJ, 2004b, p. 19)

Executive leaders decided that in order to accomplish these goals, participation was needed from all stakeholders. A college-wide team of faculty and administrators was created to give input into the project. An administrator and a faculty member were chosen to direct the program, and seven faculty members were invited to serve as student advocates. Dr. Duane Dumbleton (then President of the Kent Campus) and Dr. Shaun Pan (then Executive Dean) invited me to participate as an advocate on behalf of the students taking developmental writing and mathematics, and I, of course, volunteered immediately because I was extremely interested in adult and developmental education.

A college-wide survey was conducted, and stakeholders identified a total of 45 initiatives. Teams were formed to address each of these initiatives. The 45 initiatives were grouped into the following five categories: (a) Articulation, (b) Student Intake Processes, (c) Student Communication Processes, (d) Academic Processes, and (e) Research/Evaluative Processes (FCCJ, 2004b, p. 7). Each category was assigned to a campus president. By 2004, over 240 faculty, staff, and administrative personnel were actively involved in the QEP (FCCJ, 2004b, p. 9).

College executives believed that the QEP would have a great impact on both the students and the institution. In the college's primary developmental English course, *ENC 0021*, 73% of the students were successful in 2001-2002, and 74.2% in 2002-2003 (FCCJ, 2004b, p. 38). The goal, from the perspective of the college's leaders, was to achieve both a retention rate and a passing rate of 100% within 5 years in *ENC 0021*. The college's Executive Vice President, Dr. Donald Green, expressed a desire to see a 5% increase in the retention rate each year, which would have brought the rate, which at

the time was 74.2%, to 100%. The plan was followed for five years, from 2003 to 2008; however, the college did not see the hoped for increase in the retention rates of students taking developmental English. In addition, based on the number of students who completed the course with a grade of A, B, or C, the criterion that was established by administration, faculty, and staff as the benchmark of success, student success as measured by passing rates essentially remained the same: the number of students taking developmental English *ENC 0021* and completing the course with an grade of A, B, or C stayed between 76 and 80% (FCCJ, 2007).

However, as I became more intensely involved with the QEP process, I became aware that one strategy, that of providing students with an SLS course, appeared to increase both the retention and the success rate. If I, as a researcher, could examine the data collected during the period fall 2008 through summer 2009, and then gather data about how students who were involved in the SLS courses described their experiences in developmental English, I, and, by extension, other educators, could gain a better understanding of the factors that promoted student retention and student success, and this understanding could benefit the field by bringing about changes in the way we teach and deal with students in developmental English programs.

Participants

The participants in this study were the students in developmental English classes at FSCJ Kent Campus who were participating or had participated in the SLS program. Because FSCJ was an open access institution, there was a very diverse demographic mix of students, and this diversity was reflected in each individual developmental English

class. According to FSCJ Office of Institutional Research (2010b), 30% of the students were between the ages of 19 and 21, 37% were between 22 and 35, and 16% were 36 years and older. In addition, 40% were male and 60% were female. Approximately 30% attended full time, and 70% were part-time students. Students represented a variety of ethnicities: approximately 4% were Asian, 24% were Black, 5% were Hispanic, 63% were White, and 4% were classified as Other. In addition, approximately 64% of students who enrolled at FSCJ placed into college preparatory courses. Of these, 37% of the students who enrolled did not return after the first semester, and 48% did not reenroll during the following academic year (FCCJ, 2001b). I used the data collected from these participants to build a case database for this study.

Data Collection

To collect the data needed for this study, I used a mixed methods approach consisting of a quantitative component (examination and description of archival data) and a qualitative component (conducting a survey and two focus groups). Before starting the data collection process, I sought and received both UNF's IRB and FSCJ's IRB approval that ensured that all aspects of the study confirmed to standards that guaranteed that all participants were treated fairly, respectfully, and ethically. Because of the mixed methods approach, data collection for this study was done in two stages, one containing a quantitative component and the other a qualitative component.

Quantitative Component

The quantitative stage of the study consisted of a review of archival data provided by FSCJ's Office of Student Analytics.

Archival data. In order to determine the impact of the SLS program on retention rates and student success rates, I looked at FSCJ's college-wide data from fall 2008 to summer 2010. Academic leaders at Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ), formerly Florida Community College at Jacksonville, instituted a policy in fall 2005 which required that students who tested into two developmental courses take an SLS course that was designed to impact student retention and success (FCCJ, 2005b). Two distinct groups of students emerged that were tracked by the Office of Student Analytics: one group of students who took SLS classes, and another group of students who had not done so. In fall 2009, leaders at the college made it mandatory that all students who tested into a developmental course take the SLS course. I believed that by examining the success and retention rates of students from fall 2008 to summer 2010, I could describe the impact the SLS classes had on the success and retention rates of students at FSCJ. For instance, in each of the semesters between Fall 2008 and Summer 2010, I could compare the success rates of students who participated in the SLS program with the success rates of those who had not participated and provide percentages that reflect the success rate of each group. I could do the same comparison with the retention rates. These data were archival and were reported to me as aggregate numbers. Because the data did not include the names of students nor faculty members, anonymity of participants was maintained. I received permission from leaders at FSCJ to use this archival data, and college officials also agreed to allow me to use the services of the Director of Student Analytics. After my proposal was approved by the proposal committee and by UNF's IRB, officials at FSCJ gave me their official IRB permission to

collect these data. The quantitative component of the study was followed by a qualitative component.

Qualitative Component

The qualitative stage of the study consisted of two phases: a narrative survey and two focus groups.

Narrative survey. I received permission from Dr. Margarita Cabral-Maly, President of FSCJ Kent Campus, to conduct this survey at FSCJ-Kent Campus, pending approval of UNF's IRB (Appendix A). For the purpose of the survey, I made a list of all of the developmental English classes taught at the Kent Campus, and from that list, I selected a number of classes at random. I contacted the instructors of the classes on the list, described the plan for the study, and asked them whether they would be interested in participating in the study should the proposal be approved (Appendix B). After the proposal was approved, in anticipation of administering the survey, I printed hard copies of the materials that I intended to share with the students in each class: the Invitation to Participate in the Survey (see Appendix C), the Invitation to Participate in the Focus Group and Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D), and the survey (see Appendix E).

In order to complete the qualitative phase of the study, I first conducted a narrative survey of students in developmental English classes who had taken the SLS course. This survey consisted of a number of open-ended questions that were designed to elicit narrative responses from students that would provide an understanding of their perceptions of the program (see Appendix E). I used the following strategy:

- (1) I visited the class of each instructor who agreed to participate.

(2) During the classroom visit, I introduced myself as a student conducting a research project, described the study, and informed students of their rights as participants. I then extended to all students in class an invitation to participate in the study.

(3) Next, I provided each student who volunteered a letter and a copy of the survey.

(4) I asked each student to take the materials home, read the information very carefully, and make a decision whether to participate or not. Students who elected to participate completed the survey and brought the completed materials to class the following week.

(5) I scheduled a return visit to each class. During that visit, I placed a “secure” box on a desk at the front of the classroom, and I left the classroom for a brief period of time. Students had the opportunity to place their completed surveys in the box. Students who did not complete the surveys, but who still wished to do so, were given the opportunity to submit their materials by placing the completed forms in a “secure” box that I provided, which was located in the administrative offices at the Kent Campus. At the end of the process, I picked up all of the surveys. This process assured students that their responses could not be traced back to them. In addition, I did not identify the faculty members who volunteered to participate; therefore, no one could track the responses back to the faculty who participated in the process. The only way that someone could have known who participated in the study would have been by looking at the signed Informed Consent Forms. Because of this, I sought and received a waiver of the signed Informed Consent Form; Students were notified that by completing and

returning the survey, they were attesting that they were 18 years or older and that they had consented to participate in the study.

By using this strategy, I hoped to obtain a better number of quality responses than I would by providing the survey online. In addition, I was able to ensure the anonymity of each participant. As part of the process, I informed students of my intent to form two focus groups of approximately 10 students each, and I asked each student to notify me if he or she wished to volunteer to participate in the focus group by providing me with his or her email address by writing it down on a separate form provided specifically for the purpose of volunteering to participate in the focus group.

Focus groups. I used a homogeneous sampling approach to select students who wished to participate in the focus groups. In homogeneous sampling, the researcher “purposefully samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics” (Creswell, 2005, p. 206). This approach is used when a researcher wishes to understand and describe a particular group in depth; in this instance, I wished to get a deeper understanding of the experiences of students in developmental English classes who had taken or were taking an SLS class, so I selected students who had this experience.

In order to create the two groups, I invited a total of 25 students chosen at random from the students who volunteered to participate in the focus groups. I did so by emailing 25 of the students who volunteered to participate in the focus groups an Invitation to Participate in the Focus Group and Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D). As a result, participants were informed of their rights as participants before the focus

groups met. I also stressed their right to stop participating or to withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty or loss of any benefits. I also informed each participant of the time, day, and place of the meeting and asked each to return the signed Informed Consent Form on the day of the meeting.

I placed 10 students in one group and 11 others in a second group, and each group met for approximately 60 minutes. During the focus group meetings, I provided the participants with a number of questions that were used as prompts (see Appendix F). This intent was not to ask each student to answer each question, but rather to use the questions as conversation starters. As students discussed their experiences, I recorded the conversation with a digital recorder. After the focus groups had met, I transcribed the recordings. I then destroyed the digital files after the transcription was completed. In order to protect the identity of participants, my original intent was to assign a code name to each participant; however, that proved to be not necessary, as I found that students could not be identified by their voices and responses. In addition to recording the conversation, I also made note of anything that I observed during the focus groups that I thought would provide insight into participants' views and comments. The transcriptions and notes became a part of the case study database. All of the data collected was stored in the administrative office at FSCJ-Kent Campus in F112, a secure location.

Summary of Data Collection

In this section, I have explained that I conducted a mixed methods study that contains a quantitative and a qualitative phase to collect the data needed for this study. I presented the argument that a mixed methods approach worked best, for the following

reasons: (a) During the quantitative stage, I could describe the impact the SLS courses were having upon retention and student success rates, and (b) in the qualitative stage, I could explain how and why the SLS classes were having an impact. In addition, I described the process that I used to collect the data. For instance, I explained that in order to get multiple sources of evidence, I conducted a quantitative phase during which I examined archival data, and a qualitative phase, during which I conducted a narrative survey and two focus groups. My intent was to use the data that I collected to create a case study database which I could then analyze to get a deeper understanding of the impact of the SLS program on students taking developmental English courses.

Data Analysis

“Data analysis,” according to Yin (2009) “consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence, to draw empirically based conclusions” (p. 126). Keeping this comment in mind, I completed the data analysis phase of this study in two stages: First, I analyzed the quantitative data that was submitted to me by FSCJ’s Office of Student Analytics in order to explain the impact the SLS program had had on students taking developmental English courses at FSCJ-Kent Campus. Next, I analyzed the qualitative data following strategies outlined by Yin and Auerbach and Silverstein (2003).

I analyzed the quantitative data by comparing the success rates and the retention rates of students at FSCJ-Kent Campus who had taken only the developmental English course with rates of students who had taken both the developmental English and the SLS

course. My original intent was to look at both the numbers that were reported and to report the differences both in numbers and in percentages.

In analyzing the qualitative data, I followed Yin's (2009) advice and conducted a preliminary data analysis phase followed by a general analytical analysis phase. My approach during the initial stage of analysis was to examine the case study database that was built using the data collected from multiple sources for patterns and themes, indicated by specific words and phrases that indicated specific ideas. Although a variety of tools were available that could assist in identifying patterns and themes (Lewins & Silver, 2007; Yin, 2009), I elected not to use any such tools, and instead coded the data manually. As Yin had pointed out, "Much depends on an investigator's own style of rigorous empirical thinking, along with the sufficient presentation of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretations" (p. 127), and he had stressed the importance of the researcher as the main analyst (p. 129). As I was uniquely qualified to conduct this type of research, I, myself, analyzed and interpreted all of the data collected during the examination of the archival data, via the surveys, and the focus groups. One tip that Yin offered as a beginning point is to start with questions, identify the evidence that addresses the questions, and then draw tentative conclusions based on that evidence (p. 128). Another is to "play" with data by placing data in categories and creating flowcharts (p. 129; see Figure 5). In addition to following the procedure outlined by Yin, I also followed the process outlined by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) for manual coding of qualitative data.

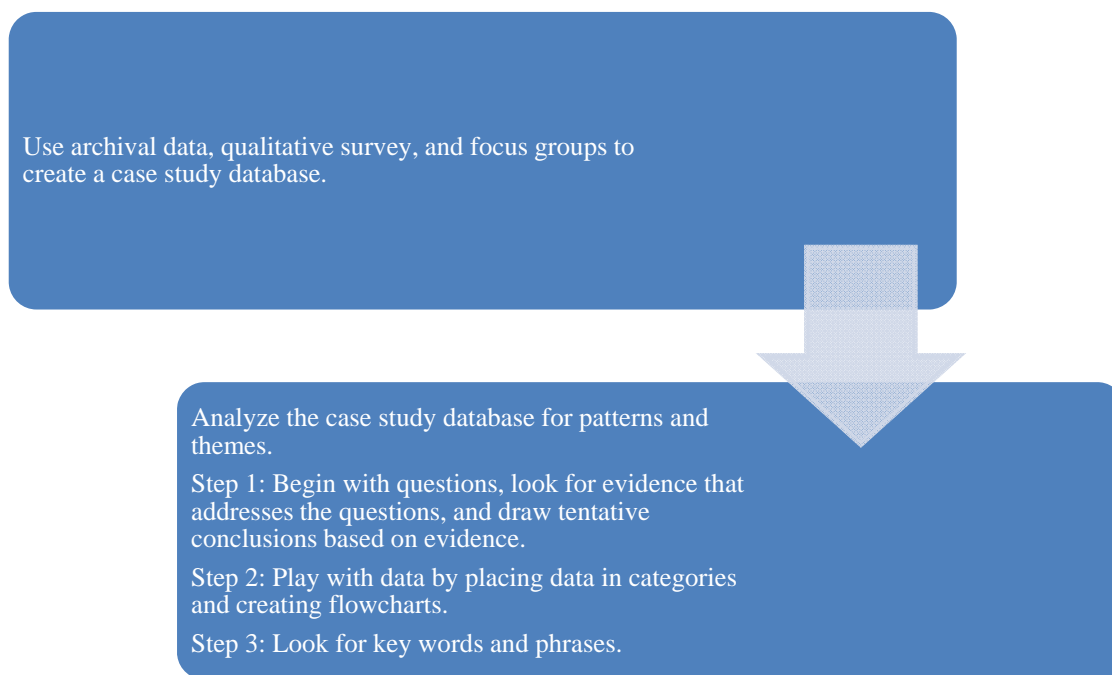


Figure 5. Preliminary analysis strategy

However, Yin (2009) cautioned that these initial steps should be only a preliminary approach. In order to address issues of validity and reliability, Yin suggested using what he referred to as a general analytic strategy and claimed that doing so is the best preparation for conducting a case study analysis (p. 135). In addition, he pointed out that such a strategy assists the researcher in crafting and telling his story (p. 130). He presented the following four strategies: (a) relying on theoretical propositions, (b) developing a case description, (c) using both qualitative and quantitative data, and (d) examining rival explanations. These strategies are not mutually exclusive; therefore, researchers can use combinations of them when analyzing data. I decided that the primary strategy that I would use as I analyzed the data was going to be “developing a case description” (Yin, 2009, p. 131). However, as I developed the case description, I

also presented a number of theoretical propositions (see Figure 6). I did so by using an analytic technique Yin called “building an explanation” (p. 141).

Yin (2009) suggested a number of analytic techniques that can be used as part of the general analytic strategy that addresses concerns of internal validity and external validity (p. 136). Of these, he noted that pattern matching was the most desirable (p. 136-141). One important type of pattern matching is to analyze data by building an explanation about the case (p. 141). Yin noted that this entails stipulating a set of causal links about a phenomenon, e.g., explaining how or why the phenomenon occurred (p. 141). While the causal links may be difficult to measure in a precise manner, Yin noted, “The better case studies are the ones in which the explanations have reflected some theoretically significant propositions” (p. 141). In order to “build” the explanation, Yin suggested the following series of iterations:

- Making an initial theoretical statement or proposition
- Comparing the findings of an initial case against such statement or proposition
- Revising the statement or proposition
- Comparing other details of the case against the revision
- Comparing the revision of the facts of a second, third, or more cases
- Repeating this process as many times as needed. (p. 143)

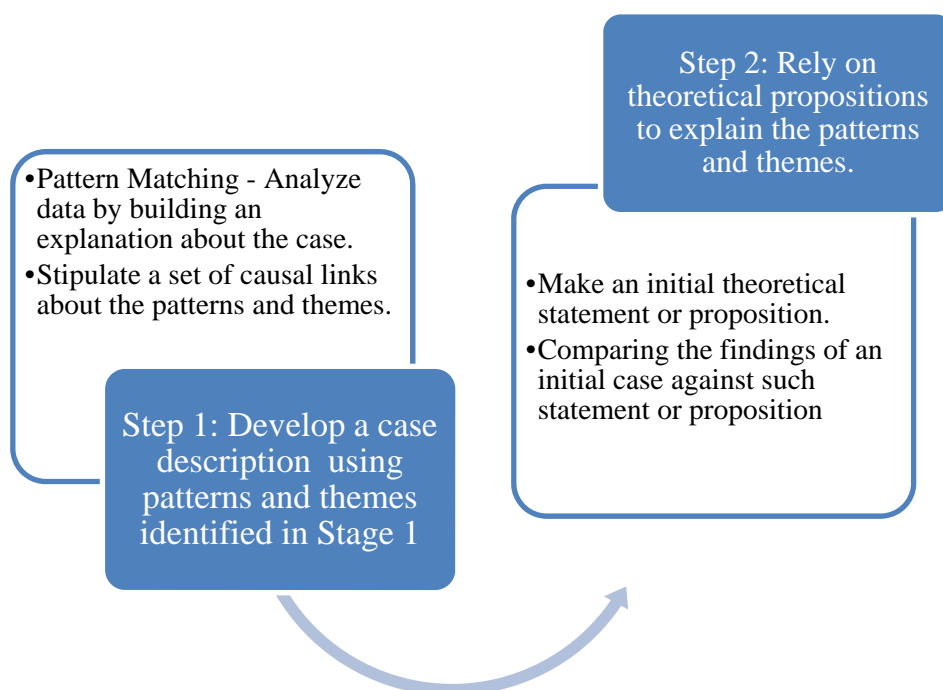


Figure 6. General analytic strategy – developing a case description by building an explanation

Yin (2009) warned that in order to engage in this process of explanation building, much analytic insight is demanded of the explanation builder (p. 144). Finally, in order to minimize errors and biases, (i.e., address issues of reliability), I took special care to ensure that other researchers can conduct the same case study at a later time and arrive at essentially the same findings and conclusions (see Yin 2009 for a discussion of reliability). Yin suggested that one way of doing this is to document the procedures followed so that the study can be repeated. This documentation occurred as I developed the case study database.

The qualitative researcher is someone who has become aware that certain actions and social situations are so complex that numerical data alone cannot reveal the

complexity of what is happening. In this section, I have explained the process that I used to analyze the data collected. As indicated, my plan was to conduct the analysis in two stages: first, I conducted a preliminary analysis; next, I conducted a more in-depth analysis using what Yin (2009) referred to as a general analytic strategy. I made the case that I was qualified to conduct such an analysis because of my knowledge of the subject matter.

The Researcher as Qualitative Researcher

Edson (1988) pointed out, “Qualitative understanding serves to condition the range and quality of human thought” (p. 45). He gave the following points:

- 1) We undertake qualitative inquiry not so much from our recognition that we do not know all the answers to our problems but rather from an appreciation of the fact that we do not know all the questions.
- 2) Qualitative inquiry also expands our understanding of research by making us conscious of our assumptions and by fostering an appreciation for complexity.
- 3) Qualitative inquiry informs our understanding of educational research by expanding our frames of reference. (Edson, 1988, p. 45)

Eisner (1998) echoed the above ideas. He noted, “Much of what is suggested to teachers and school administrators is said independent of context and often by those ignorant of the practices they wish to improve” (p. 11). He pointed out that certain questions “are not answered by examining new methods of instruction or by scrutinizing achievement test scores. They require an intimacy with what goes on in schools” (p. 11).

This deeper understanding of complex issues is what I, as a qualitative researcher, was after as it applied to students, practitioners, programs, and institutions. I felt that I was uniquely qualified to conduct this type of research. Having been involved in remedial education for over 20 years, I had been exposed to different approaches to teaching developmental English. Over the years, I had come to see myself as an educator who could appreciate the efforts that had been and were continuing to be expended to remediate students. I was even hired, first as a manager of a learning center and then as a professor, because of my interest in remediating students at all levels and in exploring approaches to teaching English. In short, I had developed a certain connoisseurship of the field. If anything, my experiences had shown me that every interaction with students in remedial programs has had some positive result, even when that positive result had not been evident at the time of the interaction. Eisner (1998) claimed, “Qualitative studies tend to be field focused” (p. 32). I considered FSCJ a living laboratory where I could study an institution’s approach to remediation and its students’ reaction to that approach.

A second characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher becomes an instrument. If anything, I saw myself as an instrument because I had vast knowledge of the field. At the same time, I was aware of the lack of knowledge that I had. Therefore, while, because of my connoisseurship, I was able to distinguish the valid from the invalid, I was at the same time open to any thought or practice that could improve knowledge in the field, i.e., I was able to pay attention to “the particulars” (Eisner, 1998, p. 38). An additional criterion that qualitative researchers must adhere to is that they must be able to interpret. Because of my connoisseurship, I was able to interpret what I

saw, hear, and otherwise experienced. As Eisner put it, “Inquirers try to account for what they have given an account of” (p. 35). Finally, Eisner stated that researchers must adhere to strict criteria in order to judge the success of the research. I was willing to do so. Not only did I intend to rely on my own observations and experiences, but I also made every effort to find out how those measured up to the experiences of other researchers who had studied similar topics.

Ethical Considerations

All data collected during the quantitative phase of the study were provided to me in aggregate form; as a result, students and faculty were anonymous as information that could identify individuals was not provided. I took the utmost care to treat participants in the qualitative phase of the study with respect and ensure that they were protected from any harm or repercussions that could have occurred because of their participation in the study. First, I explained to each person his or her rights as a participant and described the processes that I had established to make sure that those rights were not violated. I did this by means of a letter that I sent to each participant. In this *Invitation/Consent Form* letter, I notified them of the purpose of the study and the importance of their participation. I stressed that their participation was voluntary and that even if they agreed to participate initially, they still had the right to withdraw at any time they elected to do so. In addition, I assured them that I had taken steps to assure their confidentiality. Second, to ensure confidentiality, I made sure that none of the responses could be traced back to the participant who submitted the information. For instance, in the event that someone placed his or her name or any other information that could lead to his

identification, I removed or blotted out that information. Further, I stored all of the data collected, i.e., the responses to the survey and the data collected during the focus group meetings, in a secure cabinet in my office at FSCJ, Kent Campus.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 3, the chapter on methodology, I stated the purpose of the study, the research questions, and my qualifications to conduct the study. I also discussed the research site. I explained that I used a mixed methods approach to get a deeper understanding of the SLS program and its impact or lack of impact on retention and student success rates. I explained the process I used to collect the data, and I also explained the process that I followed to analyze the data. In addition to describing the methodology, I provided assurances that the rights of participants were respected, and that both participants as well as all data collected were treated with the utmost care and respect. Finally, I provided information about the documents that I gave to participants explaining their rights and to UNF's and FSCJ's Institutional Review Boards to comply with both institutions' requirements that appropriate processes and procedures were followed as I conducted the study.

In Chapter 4, I will present and analyze the data.

CHAPTER 4 – DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This study was a descriptive mixed-methods case study conducted in two stages. Stage 1 consisted of a quantitative study, and the objective was to address whether or not the SLS classes had an impact on student success and retention. Stage 2 consisted of a qualitative study during which students completed a narrative survey and participated in a focus group; the objective was to get a deeper, richer understanding of how and why the SLS program impacted students' success and retention in developmental English courses. Additionally, I was interested in finding out what elements of the SLS course were most and least valued by students taking developmental English courses. During the preliminary analysis of the data, I found, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, that though the evidence on whether the SLS program had a positive effect on student success was inconclusive, the participants in the study believed that the SLS course did have a positive impact on their performance in their developmental English course. The evidence indicating that the SLS program had a positive impact on student retention rates was also not conclusive, but participants claimed that they were more likely to enroll in ENC1101 right after taking ENC 0021 because of their SLS course. In addition, I will also show how, following a coding process developed by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), and using participants' ideas, as expressed in words and sentences, as the unit of analysis, I was able to identify a number of topics, organize them into categories,

establish themes, and ultimately connect the themes to elements of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Knowles's theory of adult learning, and Tinto's theory of individual departure. Following this process enabled me to take the perspectives of all students into account and to give voice to all participants.

In this chapter, I am presenting and analyzing the data collected in Stages 1 and 2 of the case study by developing what Yin (2009) referred to as a case description. Yin suggested using a case description approach as an analytic strategy when data collected during research does not adhere to, conform to, or follow a specific theory. Therefore, I created a case description based on a descriptive framework that organizes the study by the themes I established. Then, within this framework, I used an analytic technique that Yin (2009) referred to as "explanation building" (p. 141) to explain the data that pertain to each of the themes in the framework. Yin noted, "The goal is to analyze the case study data by building an explanation about the case" (p. 141). Finally, following Yin's advice that the stronger case studies have narrative explanations that reflect some theoretically significant propositions, I connected the themes used in the case description to propositions from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943, 1954), Knowles's theory of adult learning (1979), and Tinto's theory of individual departure (1987).

Stage I - Impact on Student Success and Retention

Results obtained by FSCJ Office of Student Analytics (2011) regarding the retention rates of students who had completed the SLS course at the Kent Campus indicated that the SLS course had had a positive impact on retention rates when researchers looked at only the SLS data. For instance, in Fall 2005, 250 students had

taken an SLS course. Of these, 234 reenrolled in Spring 2006. This was a retention rate of 94%. In the same term, of 464 students who did not take the SLS course, only 255 returned. This was a retention rate of only 55%. In the fall of 2006, 194 students took the SLS course; 168 returned in Spring 2007 (87%). Of the 620 students who did not take the SLS course in the spring of 2007, only 373 (60%) returned. In the fall of 2007, 519 students took the SLS course; 419 (81%) were retained in the spring 2008 term; of the 404 who did not take the SLS course, only 254 (63%) were retained. These data, obtained prior to Fall 2008, led leaders at the college to believe that the SLS program would have a positive impact on student retention rates and were used to support the decision to institute a policy change regarding the SLS program in Fall 2009.

In addition to these data, a number of studies (FDOE, 2006; Zeidenberg et al., 2007) had addressed the issue of whether or not students who participated in the SLS program were retained longer and experienced higher success rates, and researchers had found a positive impact. Because of these findings, leaders at the college instituted the policy in Fall 2009 that required students who tested into any developmental course to take the SLS course.

For the purpose of this study, I wished to get a picture of what had occurred at FSCJ-Kent Campus, the research site of the study in the developmental English program. As a result, during Stage I, I reviewed data from six semesters (from Fall 2008 to Summer 2010) to find out whether or not the SLS program at FSCJ Kent Campus did indeed impact student success and student retention at the institution. A review of data from Fall 2008 to Summer 2010 indicated the following (see Table 1):

Table 1

Impact of the SLS Course on Student Success

Term and Academic Year	Number of Students Who Took ENC0021 but did not take SLS	Number Who Passed ENC0021	Percentage Who Passed ENC0021	Number of Students Who Took ENC0021 and SLS	Number Who Passed ENC0021	Percentage Who Passed ENC0021
Fall 2008	77	72	94%	99	92	93%
Spring 2009	29	27	93%	59	49	83%
Summer 2009	16	16	100%	35	31	89%
Subtotal: 2008/2009	122	115	94%	193	172	89%
Fall 2009	11	8	73%	204	179	88%
Spring 2010	5	3	60%	129	104	81%
Summer 2010	4	2	50%	72	52	72%
Subtotal: 2009/2010	20	13	65%	405	335	83%

In the 2008-2009 academic year, students who tested into two developmental courses were required to take the SLS course. The reasoning behind this policy was that students who tested into two developmental classes were weaker in academic skills and needed more support to be successful. However, students who tested into only one developmental course were not required to take an SLS course. In the fall of 2008, 72 of the 77 students who took ENC0021 completed the class successfully. During the same time, 92 of the 99 students who took both the SLS and the English courses were successful. If one looks at the numbers in terms of percentages, the success rate of students who took only English in the 2008-2009 Academic year was 94%, and the success rate of the students who took English and SLS was 89%. This difference in success rates probably occurred because the students taking both the English and SLS

course were weaker students, (i.e., the students who had tested into two developmental courses). In addition, during a number of feedback sessions conducted during the 2003-2008 Quality Enhancement Plan at FSCJ, a number of instructors reported that some students who had successfully completed their courses had taken a course similar to the SLS course prior to taking the developmental English course.

In the 2009-2010 academic year, the policy was enacted which required students who tested into any college preparatory class to take the SLS course. As a result, very few students were given permission to take only English - 11 in the fall, 5 in the spring, and 4 in the summer. (The data in Table 1 reflect the drop in the number and percentage of those students not taking the SLS course because of the policy changes being applied.) Of these students, 65% completed the course successfully. During the same period, 82% of the students who took both courses completed the ENC0021 successfully. Though the difference between the two groups of students was 17 points, the disparity in the number of students between the two sample groups was so great (20 vs. 405 because of the implementation of the policy) that the data do not provide conclusive evidence of whether or not the SLS class had a negative or positive effect on student success rates in the developmental English program.

In looking at the impact on the retention rates in Table 2, a similar situation occurred:

Table 2

Impact of the SLS Course on Retention Rates

Term and Academic Year	Number of Students Who Took ENC0021 but did not take SLS	Number Who Passed ENC0021 and Took ENC1101	Percentage Who Passed ENC0021 and Took ENC1101	Number of Students Who Took ENC0021 and SLS	Number Who Passed ENC0021 and Took ENC1101	Percentage Who Passed ENC0021 and Took ENC1101
Fall 2008	77	48	67%	99	70	76%
Spring 2009	29	21	78%	59	36	73%
Summer 2009	16	9	56%	35	21	68%
Subtotal: 2008/2009	122	78	68%	193	127	74%
Fall 2009	11	5	63%	204	144	80%
Spring 2010	5	0	0%	129	54	52%
Summer 2010	4	0	0%	72	28	54%
Subtotal: 2009/2010	20	5	38%	405	226	67%

In the 2007-2008 Academic year, the retention rate of students who had taken only ENC 0021 and passed, and then taken ENC 1101 was 61%. The retention rate of those who had taken both an SLS and the ENC0021 English course was 63%. This difference was not statistically significant. By the 2009-2010 Academic year, the percentages were 38% vs. 67%. This was a difference of 29 points. However, once again, because of the disparity in the number of students between the two sample groups because of the policy change being applied (20 vs. 405), the data did not provide conclusive evidence as to whether or not the SLS class had a negative or positive effect on student retention rates in the English program.

Though the data analyzed during Stage I did not provide conclusive evidence that the SLS program had a positive impact on student success and retention in the developmental English courses at the Kent Campus, the data collected during Stage II of the study indicated that participants believed that the SLS program at the Kent Campus did have a positive effect on their success and on their decision to take additional course the following semester.

Stage II – How and Why Did the SLS Program Impact Student Retention and Success?

Stage II of the study consisted of a narrative survey and two focus groups. A total of 100 students participated in the qualitative study: 79 completed the narrative survey, and 21 participated in the focus group discussions. Although the data assessing whether the SLS courses had a positive impact on student success rates or retention rates proved inconclusive, the data collected in Stage II during the qualitative phase of the study indicated that most participants believed that the SLS course had had a positive impact on their success and retention, especially on their performance in their English class. During Stage II, I sought to answer Research Question 2, “What reasons do students in developmental English give for the impact or lack of impact?” and Research Question 3, “What elements of the SLS course are most and least valued by students taking developmental English courses?”

On the narrative survey, I specifically asked the following question, “How did the course impact your performance in your developmental English course?” Of the 79 students who responded to the narrative survey, only one wrote that the course had no

impact on his performance. This was one of two participants who wrote that he had taken the SLS course online, and he reported having a terrible experience. Because of the anonymity of the participants, I could not get any additional information about his experiences other than what he wrote on the survey. The other participant who took the course online reported having a positive experience. The other 77 students responded that the course had had a positive impact on their success in the English class. One student wrote, “This course impacted my performance because it helped me identify the weak areas in my writing.” Another stated, “Being out of school for years, it brought me back up to speed.” Specifically, students felt that what they had learned in their SLS class really influenced their performance in their developmental English course because of the writing activities that were required in the SLS course. The overall sentiment was that the impact that the SLS course had on them was due to many factors associated with the course.

To address Research Question 3, I asked, “What parts of the course or topics covered were most beneficial to you?” and “What parts or topics covered were the least beneficial to you?” As indicated in the data that follows, participants responded that every aspect of the course was beneficial. While some noted that specific parts were of little or no value, others identified those same topics as valuable.

To get a deeper, richer understanding of participants’ responses, I coded the data manually, using the following six-step procedure outlined by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003, p. 43) in the text *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis*:

- 1) State your research concerns and theoretical framework.

- 2) Select relevant text for future analysis by reading through the raw text and highlighting relevant text.
- 3) Record repeating ideas by grouping together related passages of relevant text.
- 4) Organize themes by grouping repeating ideas into coherent categories.
- 5) Develop theoretical constructs by grouping themes into more abstract concepts consistent with your theoretical framework.
- 6) Create a theoretical narrative by retelling the participant's story in terms of the theoretical constructs.

Following these procedures, I began the process by reviewing my research questions and the literature that I thought would provide a suitable theoretical framework for the study. Next, I selected one survey for analysis. I read the participant's responses very carefully and selected relevant text by highlighting words, phrases, and sentences that indicated specific ideas. To illustrate the analysis process, here are the responses written on the first survey and the text that I highlighted that I believed to be relevant:

- 1) It is a fun class to be in. You learn a lot that you did not know before.
- 2) How to be prepared for your classes and finding the right job.
- 3) Nothing
- 4) The True Colors test. Can tell what you are and maybe what you will be when you find that job.
- 5) Helped me a lot about being more prepared for my English course.
- 6) Study more instead of studying at the last minute.
- 7) Yes, because the lesson helped you out for studying.

8) Nothing,

9) [no response]

After I highlighted what I judged to be relevant text, I saw that a group of words, phrases, and sentences related to studying and study skills (i.e., responses 6 and 7), so to begin the list of topics I wrote down the topic *study skills*. The responses “how to prepare for your classes,” “learn a lot that you did not know before,” and “helped me a lot about being prepared for my English course” related to information, so I added a topic called *information*. I continued adding topics using the ideas provided by the student. For instance, based on the response “finding the right job” and “what you will be when you find that job,” I added the topic *careers* to the list. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) had stressed that this process of creating topics was not going to be a simple, straight forward process, and I found that to be the case as I had to revisit and rename a number of the topics that I had selected until I arrived at the names that I thought best represented the ideas expressed.

With this first survey as a starting point, I continued this process using the ideas expressed in the second survey, then the third, then the fourth, and so on. As I analyzed the data in successive surveys, I noted after a while that the comments in the responses repeated essentially the same idea or ideas. When that occurred, I stopped adding to the list. Thus, in essence, I used the ideas expressed as the unit of analysis.

Table 3

List of Topics Identified from the Narrative Survey

Advising	Note Taking
Avoiding Procrastination	Organization Skills
BlackBoard	Public Speaking
Careers	Research Skills
Counseling	Self-reflection
Financial Aid	Study Skills
Inspiration	Technology
Learning Resources	Time Management
Library Resources	Tutoring
Mentoring	Vocabulary Building
Money Management	Writing Skills
Networking	

After I had created the list of topics based on the data from the narrative survey, I analyzed the data collected during the focus groups. My intent during the focus group interviews was to build upon the data collected during the survey by giving students the opportunity to express their thoughts orally and to discuss the comments among themselves. Upon reviewing the data collected during the focus group meetings, I found that many of the ideas expressed could be placed under the topics that I already had on the list. In cases where an idea was discussed that I could not place in one of the existing topics, I added a new topic to the list. I have listed all of the topics alphabetically in Table 4.

Table 4

List of Topics Identified from the Narrative and Focus Groups Data

Activities*	Library Resources
Advising	Mentoring
Avoiding Procrastination	Money Management
BlackBoard	Networking
Careers	Note Taking
College Experience*	Organization Skills
Conflict Resolution*	Orientation*
Counseling	Public Speaking
Financial Aid	Research Skills
Group Work*	Self-reflection
Handbook Issues*	Study Skills
Information*	Teaching Style
Inspiration	Technology
Issue with Professors*	Time Management
Journaling	Topics*
Learning Communities*	Tutoring
Learning Resources	Vocabulary Building
Learning Style*	Writing Skills

Note. An * denotes items added to the list of topics during the focus group meetings.

In Step 4 of the coding procedure, Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) suggested that researchers “Organize themes by grouping repeating ideas into coherent categories” (p. 43) Though it was not their intent that researchers actually create categories (they were actually referring to the grouping of themes as categories), I inserted this step because doing so made it easier to work with the data. Therefore, I reviewed the topics and organized them into categories. I did so based upon relationships that I believed existed among the topics. For instance, it appeared that the topics study skills and learning skills were related because they both contained skills that affected participants’ academic performance. Therefore, I created a category called Academics. Likewise, I

created the categories Life Skills Issues, and Advising and Mentoring, Learning Resources, and Technology (see Figure 7).

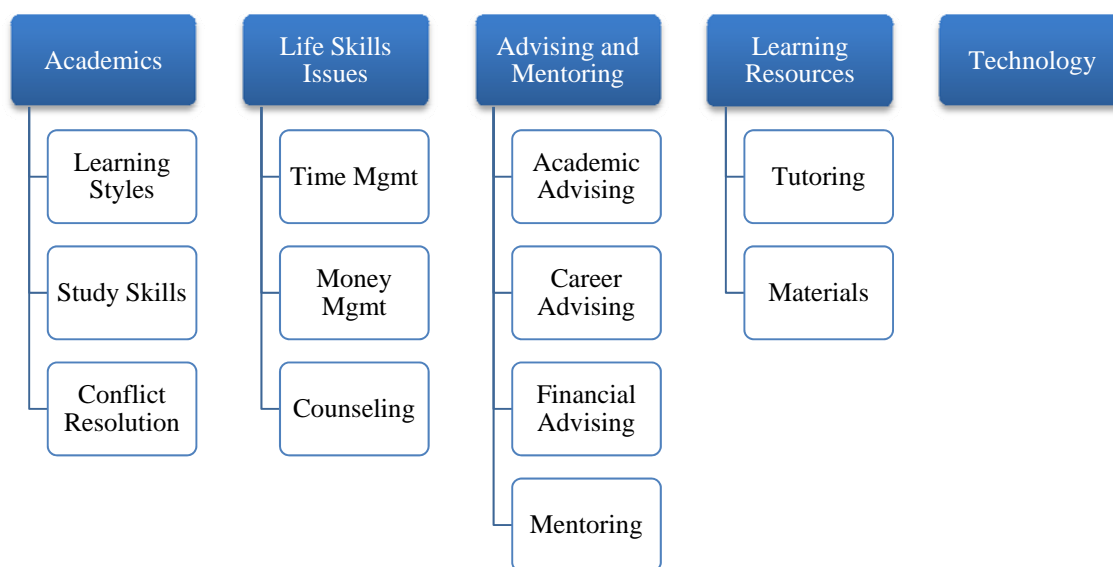


Figure 7. Categories identified in the case study database

As I looked at these broad categories, I realized that they reflected the challenges that students faced as they transitioned and attempted to integrate themselves into the college environment (as reported by Brock et al., 2007; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; McCabe & Day, 1998; Sawma, 2000; Tinto, 1987, 1993). For instance, participants who indicated that academics was important to them noted that they benefited from the information that they had received in the SLS class and wished to have more information about academic topics such as learning styles and study skills. In addition, when participants commented that they appreciated the technology they had access to, but expressed concerns about using that technology, they noted the need for

additional information about using the technology. In a similar manner, they expressed a need for information about learning resources. Therefore, based on my knowledge of the field, I created the following theme that spoke to this need: The need for information. In the same manner, I identified the following two additional themes, the desire for advising and mentoring and the need to address life skills issues. I then proceeded to develop a description of the case based on these themes.

Theme I: The Need for Information

One recurring idea in the data was that most participants believed that the primary cause for any positive impact they had experienced was the information that they had received because of the SLS program. This idea was so prevalent that it led me to create the following theme: The need for information. One student summarized this sentiment in the following sentence, “There was so much about the college that I did not know.” During the focus group meetings, participants became very animated when this topic was discussed. From the comments that participants made, it appeared that at any given time only about half of the students had the correct information about what was happening. Most agreed that the SLS class was an important source of information.

According to Knowles’s theory of adult learning (1970, 1978, 1980), the learner’s need to know is a key principle of learning when dealing with adult learners. Knowles (1970) suggested that adults learn best when they have all of the information that they need about a topic or process. In a way, by giving information to students, educators were satisfying the safety needs as well as the social needs of students, needs that

Maslow (1943, 1954) claimed needed to be met before individuals could be motivated to move up to a higher level of performing on his hierarchy of needs.

Researchers noted that community colleges seek to assist students to become integrated into the college environment by provided them with additional resources and opportunities (Bailey et al., 2004; O’Gara et al., 2009). However, participants indicated they frequently had no idea of the resources and services that were available to them despite the best efforts of college personnel. Because of this, students felt that the primary benefit of taking the SLS course was acquiring information about the college from a trusted person. In a way, the SLS program provided students with a framework upon which they could build a knowledge base about academic processes; a number of participants noted that they found out why the resources were important and why it was important to use them. Over time, many developed a level of comfort interacting with others on campus and started to use the resources that were available. As one student expressed it, “[The] SLS class allows you to meet others and get well acquainted with the campus.” This change in attitude was consistent with what Knowles (1970) had indicated would occur when students are given information.

An important phenomenon was where students found information about the college. According to participants in the study, though they had found out about the college during orientation, the primary sources of information were word of mouth from friends, instructors, and advisors. One comment about the orientation was that it was too short and contained too much information. As a result, a number of students reported that they were unable to process all of the information that they had received and had

frequently become confused by what they had heard. Six students said that they referred to a student handbook that they had received during the orientation. This handbook contained a condensed version of information about the college. However, a few of them reported that they had some difficulty understanding the material. Two others stated that the handbook did not contain enough information, at least not about the things that they needed to know. For instance, it didn't explain what a student should do if he went to a professor's office more than once and didn't find that professor in her office during her office hours. Most of the students said that they felt comfortable discussing situations like these in their SLS class with their professor and fellow students. Interestingly enough, though students were aware that the college catalog was a source of more in-depth information and though it was available online, five students, in response to a question posed by me during a focus group meeting, replied that they did not use it as a resource. However, a few of these students said that this behavior changed over time because of their experiences in the SLS course. Most participants agreed that though information about the college was readily available elsewhere, they preferred to get information in their SLS class because the information was conveyed in a manner that was easy to understand. In addition, they had the opportunity to discuss anything that was confusing, and this led to a better understanding of what was expected of them.

I will now, as I continue to develop this case description, discuss in some detail the topics in Theme I: The need for information.

Academic procedures and processes. One recurring comment was how different the college experience was from what participants had expected. Many were

unaware of academic practices, especially as found in higher education institutions. Some were unfamiliar with behaviors used in teaching, learning, and studying, and information about these items proved to be helpful to students in their English classes.

For instance, some students were not aware that professors had specific rights, including the right to use different methods of teaching. Students were not familiar with concepts such as *academic freedom*. One student said:

I never realized that a professor had the right to say anything he wanted to say. My sister was taking a class in religion and had a lot of problems with the views of the professor. She had gone to the dean to talk about him, but he did not help her, so she withdrew from the course. What I learned in the SLS class made me understand why he did not help. This came back to me when I was in my English course, and the professor told me that I had to study by myself on the computer. If I had not had the SLS class, I would have gone to the dean to talk about that, but I didn't because I knew that he was not going to help me. I did not withdraw from the course, and I am passing the class.

For some, the first time that they had ever thought about such things as a professor's teaching style or demeanor was when the topic was brought up in the SLS course. By understanding what to expect, students were able to minimize the number of problems that they encountered. According to students, their SLS professors not only discussed these issues in class, they also taught the SLS classes using different methods of teaching. By doing so, they were able to show students what to expect and prepare them for their other classes. Even then, some participants still had a problem dealing

with the different approaches. One student wrote, “My experience in my SLS class was not what I thought it would be. It was a great course, but I thought it would be based on more of taking notes and observing than writing.” Another complained, “My experience in SLS class is not the best. The professor gives homework that doesn’t relate to SLS and is always off topic in class. We do a lot of group work, which I believe we shouldn’t do unless it is a lab, and SLS is not a lab.” Despite these comments, the general sentiment of the participants was that the professors in the SLS classes were preparing them for the teaching styles that they would encounter when they took other professors in different classes, and this perspective held true as they progressed through their developmental English course.

Participants noted that such insight into the academic process prevented major problems from occurring: Because of the information that was covered in the SLS class, a number of students reported that they were able to avoid conflict, both with their peers and with their instructors. As students became aware of the rights in college of instructors and their fellow students, they realized that certain behaviors that they had engaged in were not tolerated in a college setting. For instance, one student noted:

I had always thought that I could do whatever I wanted in college. However, I found out in the SLS class that there was an attendance policy and that I would lose points if I did not come to class. Because of this, I realized that I had been mistaken about doing whatever I wanted. In my English class, I was told that if I missed 9 hours of class, I would fail the course. So I know not to miss 9 hours and won’t stress about it.

At the same time, they also became aware of some of their own rights. Some students had not been aware that there was an official process in place to contest a grade or any other academic decision or perceived injustice that had been committed against them. One student explained that he learned about this when the Dean of Student Success visited his class. She explained the Code of Conduct and the appeal process. “I now know that I need to document everything that happens if I ever get into any kind of trouble,” he noted. A few students noted that one important thing they had learned in the SLS class was how to prevent problems before they happened by being proactive. “My instructor, who was the Dean of Student Success, told us that we could withdraw if we started to have major issues in life instead of just stop coming and then have to file an appeal,” a student noted.

Some did not know how to approach an instructor whenever there was disagreement. One reason was that students frequently did not understand their rights versus the instructor’s rights. As a result, they frequently decided to err on the side of caution by not doing anything. The SLS classroom became a place where they could discuss such topics in what they believed to be a safe environment. Some felt that it was great to have a place where they felt safe enough to discuss issues without creating a problem.

Quite a few students claimed that they had never been made aware that there were different styles of learning. Though one student commented that he was aware of his learning style because he had attended a college preparatory school, many others noted that no one had ever told them about their learning style nor helped them understand it.

Because of this, a few found the unit on learning styles extremely helpful. Students reported that they found it fascinating to learn about themselves, especially when they were asked to write reflection papers about themselves. Participants noted that activities that made them think themselves and how they made decisions were useful because such reflection made them more aware of their behavior and how that behavior could impact their performance in classes. Many participants noted that they had enjoyed participating in a workshop called True Colors, a process designed to assist them to find out about their personality and how it influenced their behavior and thinking preferences. One student wrote, “My favorite assignment was True Colors. We joined with another class and found out what our color was. It was basically what type of person you are and who has your color.” Others noted that they had taken some type of learning styles test online. Some said that they were so excited about the learning style tests that were online that they went home and asked family members to take the tests.

Another important challenge that students faced was that many did not know how to study. In the SLS classes, students were introduced to concepts such creating a study plan, working in study groups, and developing study habits, and these activities helped them immensely in their developmental English classes. Prior to taking the SLS class, some students reported that they did not know that studying was something that could be learned and improved. In response to the question, “What parts of the course or topics covered were most beneficial to you?” one student remarked, “When we talked about the different ways to study, it helped me because now I know that there is more than one way to study.” Other comments included, “We covered a study plan” and “Study tricks.

Ways to do better on a test.” Once again, participants reported that having this information empowered them, and they in turn shared the information with others they cared about. Without a doubt, most believed that the information made them better students.

Learning resources. At the beginning of the term, many of the participants in the study, because they were attending college for the first time, had not known about the academic support services that were available to them that could have helped them in their developmental English course. Although all of the participants in the focus groups had heard of the Academic Success Center and the Learning Resource Center, both located at FSCJ Kent Campus in what was referred to as the Library Learning Commons, many confessed that at the beginning of the class they had no clear idea of what to expect in those areas. At that time, the SLS professors played a crucial role in allaying their fears. All participants reported that their professors had taken them to the Library Learning Commons area during either the first or second week of the SLS class, and they had been given an orientation by one of the staff members. In addition, they received information about these areas in their SLS class, and tutors even visited some of the classes. Because of such activities, many of the participants were able to develop relationships with the people who worked in these areas and that increased their level of comfort.

The tutoring services were among the most beneficial services on campus, according to students. One of the important concepts that was covered in the SLS classes was how tutoring worked. For many, the SLS instructor was the first person who took

the time to explain to them the role of tutors. Some had had the idea that tutors were people who would help them if they had problems, and others had heard that the tutors would correct their papers for them if they needed help. In the SLS class, they learned that a good experience with the tutors was dependent upon the relationship that they built with the tutors. They were happy that their SLS instructors took them to the Library Learning Commons and invited tutors to the class and gave them an opportunity to interact with the tutors. One student noted, “I thought the orientation in the library was a good idea. It was nice having someone show me how to look library books up on the computer.”

One additional academic benefit that students experienced in the SLS class that helped them in their developmental English course was finding out about the resources available to them in the Learning Commons. Students did not realize that they could check out DVDs that contained much of the same subject matter they were covering in class. They were unaware that such resources even existed. By participating in the library orientation organized by the SLS professors, students learned about these resources. Students were also excited about the e-book system that could be accessed even when they were not on campus. One student said that he had learned in his SLS class that the public library also provided tutoring in English. Another said that he had found out in his SLS class that he could check out books at Amazon on his Kindle. From the students’ comments, it became clear that information was being shared in class not only by the professor, but by other students in the class as well. What appeared to be the

case was that students felt comfortable enough to share information with each other when they were in class.

Assistance with technology. One interesting observation that emerged from the data was the mixed feelings that participants had about the technology used at the college. Though students liked using the computers and other devices, they were concerned about the technology. Because of this, they had a burning desire for additional information about the technology, and they received quite a bit of this information in their SLS class.

Based on the discussion that took place, participants liked to use the technology that was available when everything worked well. They pointed out that they used a software packet associated with their textbook called MyWritingLab in their developmental English classes. In response to the question, “Please describe your favorite assignment or activity in the course?” a student commented, “My favorite assignment was getting on MyWritingLab and doing the different recall and apply exercises because they helped me a lot.” Another wrote, “Working on the computer on the assignments.” In addition, a few commented that they enjoyed presenting their work using PowerPoint and the overhead projector located in the classrooms. However, students also noted that there was a downside to the use of technology.

One of the first problems, according to some students, was that people assumed that they all knew a lot about technology. This was not true. One student pointed out, “A lot of people do not have computers at home and not enough time to spend at the school [in the computer labs].” He saw the computer component of the course as a problem

because he could not access the computer from his home and had a problem committing to the time required in the computer lab. In addition, when there were problems with the technology, students said that they did not know enough to figure out whether they were doing something wrong or whether the system wasn't working. One complained, "No one ever tells us when the system will be down, and at times the assignments in the MyWritingLabs program are not clear. I spent a whole weekend trying to complete my paragraph assignment but could not because the system was not working. When it did finally start to work, I had to rush to get all of the assignments done. Then I found out that I had done too many paragraphs." An additional challenge was that a few students did not know how to navigate the college's information system. Some became confused using the student portal Connections and BlackBoard.

Because of these types of concerns, students valued the information they received in their SLS class. Students felt that the SLS class, especially during the first few meetings, was like a workshop on technology. The teachers spent a lot of time explaining how everything worked, and this made it easier to use the computers in the English class. In addition, participants noted that they valued the help they received from the instructor. Some, for instance, did not know how to get an email account and a password. One student said that she had tried everything she could to get into her account. She had even contacted the technical assistance center and had been told that they did not see any problem with her account. Finally, in desperation, she notified her SLS instructor that she could not submit her work in any of her classes because she did

not have access to the computer system. The professor got involved, and the problem was quickly resolved.

Though there were concerns associated with using technology, participants reported that they liked to use the technology that was available, as long as it worked well. Most felt that the SLS class benefitted them because of the instruction that they received from the SLS instructor about using the technology and dealing with problems when those arose.

Acquiring information proved to be a major challenge for participants. Students, especially those who were attending the college for the first time, noted that information about processes and procedures, the availability of resources, and how to use technology was essential to their peace of mind and their success. However, in addition to needing information, students also believed that building relationships was important. As a result, many participants expressed a desire for advising and mentoring.

Theme II: The Desire for Advising and Mentoring

In this section of the case description, I will explain participants' views of *Theme II: The Desire for Advising and Mentoring*. According to some participants, one of the topics discussed in the SLS class that helped them was the importance of advising and counseling. Because many were attending college for the first time, they did not realize that this type of information and assistance was readily available. Despite the fact that students had been told about the advising and counseling services during orientation, most in the focus groups said that they had approached the advising and counseling process just as one more thing they had to check off of their list of "things that needed to

be done to start taking courses.” Some participants noted that even though they had been told that advisors were available and willing to talk to them, they had still thought that access was very limited. The activities they participated in in the SLS class assisted greatly in changing their perceptions. Because of the activities, some of the participants became aware that they needed advice about academics. Others realized that they could get assistance with career opportunities and choices. Here again, the SLS class functioned as a mechanism to assist students in getting integrated into the college community, per Tinto’s theory of individual departure (1987).

Academic advising. Participants reported a need for academic advising. Some participants noted that they had received little guidance regarding the selection of courses. It was not that advisors were unavailable; they had just not thought of taking the time to meet with them. Many reported that they had very lofty goals. However, they needed guidance to get from where they were to where they wished to be or at least to become aware of what was needed to get them where they wished to go. One student, for instance, noted that he had wanted to become a doctor. Yet, it was not until he took the SLS class that he found out that he had never taken any substantial courses in science. What was even more important to him was that he realized that he had no intention of doing so. As a result, he decided not to pursue a career in the medical field. He appreciated the activity that made him realize that he did not really want to pursue his original goal.

Something that many students liked was that an advisor visited the SLS classes. This gave some students an opportunity to find out about the advising process and to

develop a relationship with an advisor. For instance, one student noted that he did speak with an academic advisor at the beginning of the term. However, because he was in developmental classes, she told him not to worry about his courses and to come back and see her after he had passed his college preparatory courses. When he mentioned this experience to the advisor who visited the class, she told him to stop by and meet with her. She explained that she would go over a program of study with him. He noted, “She even offered to discuss my experience with the advisor who had sent me away, but I could not remember who that person was and didn’t want to get anyone in trouble.”

Career advising. A few students really needed assistance with career planning. Some were unemployed or worked only part-time but were seeking full time employment. Almost all of the students who were engaged in the focus group discussion saw college as a way to become more employable. Because of this, students welcomed any advice and information about careers. Comments that spoke to this need included, “Writing a resume and having a positive attitude and how to approach people the right people [were topics covered that were beneficial to me],” “Searching for a job and financial loans,” and “How to work in a group and meet people who would benefit you.” According to most participants, as part of the SLS program, professors would invite a representative from the career services department to speak to the class. The presentation included information about resume writing, interviewing for jobs, and even assistance in finding out about jobs that were posted. Many found this activity quite beneficial.

Students were especially happy that the SLS classes provided them with an opportunity to network. “My professor had a service learning assignment, and I was able

to meet some people when I completed that assignment.” Another said, “I attended a presentation on networking, and the man [who conducted the presentation] told us how to network. I had not thought that I was networking when I went to church or took my son to his baseball game.” One student thought that the networking activity he participated in was perhaps the most beneficial activity in the course. He wrote, “Networking was the most beneficial to me because as of right now I have my own music broadcast online that helps new and upcoming artists.”

Financial advising. An area that caused anxiety was financial aid. Nine of the participants in the focus group reported that, no matter how hard they tried, they never felt that they understood the process. Most had completed the initial paperwork, but they had heard so many different, conflicting information from friends that they were anxious about the process. Once again, students found the SLS experience beneficial in that there were activities that addressed this concern. Many of these students noted that an advisor had visited the SLS class that they had taken and had given them very useful information. That person was able in many cases to explain the process and warn them about deadlines and required documents. Sadly, different students reported different experiences. In one case, a student reported, “The advisor that came to my class just said, ‘I am the advisor, but I cannot discuss your concerns in public. Stop by my office if you have any questions.’ She was a nice person, and she talked to us for a few minutes, but I do not believe that she was as helpful as some of the others [participants] are saying their advisors were.” However, it was evident, especially during the focus group discussions, that participants believed that such visits were extremely helpful.

Mentoring. Generally, students stated that they felt more comfortable talking to their instructors than with anyone else, and quite a few had come to see their SLS instructor as a mentor. However, some of the participants said that though they wished that their SLS professor could have been their mentor, such a relationship was not possible because they could not get in contact with their professors. A few wished that their instructor could have offered more advice regarding the issues that they were concerned about. One student noted that her SLS instructor helped her out above and beyond what she had expected. She had failed an exit test twice and was told that she had to take the course over a third time. This meant that she would have had to pay out of state tuition, which she could not afford. When she told her SLS instructor about this, the instructor contacted the professor who had taught her developmental English course, and she was allowed to remediate with the instructor. She noted, “This is why I am in class right now. The professor invited me to sit in her class and prepare for the retest with the other students in class.” Additionally, one participant noted that his SLS instructor was so concerned about him being nervous about taking the exit writing test that she allowed him to write paragraphs in the SLS class to prepare for the test. Another shared that his professor had been giving the entire class writing assignments all along in an attempt to get them to reflect on what they had done in life, and that his skills had improved in his English class because of the SLS class.

One important aspect of the mentoring process was the relationships that the students developed while in the SLS class. One student said that in addition to being a mentor herself, her instructor had arranged to find each student in the class a mentor who

was a leader in the community. Others spoke of the relationship that developed when advisors and faculty members came to the class as guest speakers. One student described a visit by an instructor who made a presentation on a program called True Colors, which the student enjoyed immensely. She found out that the same instructor was going to teach ENC 1101, so she decided to take her class. One student was especially amazed because his entire SLS class was able to meet and have dinner with the Lieutenant Governor. Students placed immense value on these types of activities. Some thought that the relationships that were developed would assist them in life in general.

Participants noted that making contacts and building relationships with people at the college was important to them, and they valued the opportunity the SLS program offered them to engage in activities that accomplished these goals. At the same time, a few wrote that they faced such challenges in life that, despite enrolling in college, they did not really think that they could be successful. These students wrote of experiences that they had had in the SLS class that assisted them greatly in meeting the challenges they faced because of these issues that I will refer to as life skills issues.

Theme III: The Need to Address Life Skills Issues

One benefit of the SLS course was that it gave students an opportunity to address other issues that came up in their lives that were not directly related to their academic performance, but yet had a tremendous impact on their success in college. The data reflected many comments regarding time management, money management, organization, self-reflection, and skills dealing with problems and conflicts in life, and these topics led me to develop *Theme III: The Need to Address Life Skills Issues*.

Specific comments in response to the question regarding the parts of the course and topics covered that were most beneficial included “The most beneficial topic covered was money management,” “Learning how to write a resume and managing money,” “Time management, wellness and stress, and [avoiding] procrastination,” and “Budgets, time management, and [setting] priorities.” From the responses, it was evident that these life skills topics presented serious challenges to students and that they needed assistance dealing with them. According to most, the SLS program was able to assist them by teaching them how to deal with these life issues. For instance, a number of participants felt that the time spent on time management was beneficial to them. A student stated, “I used to approach the things that I had to do on a ‘what’s in front of me’ basis.” Another remarked, “As a student who is just starting out, I needed to know how to set aside a certain time to study and to prioritize. I wished to see more of it [time management] in the course. I am still having challenges in the course [with time management], and I wish that we did more on time management.” One student summed the experience in the SLS class in this sentence, “There was a way she [the teacher] explained how to juggle everything about school, life, and work together.” One student noted that her instructor was able to provide students in her class with a list of resources in the community that could provide assistance to those in need.

An important aspect of the SLS course for a few participants was the help that they received from their SLS instructors when they had experienced personal problems, even after the SLS class was over. One student noted that she had been dealing with some serious life issues and had thought about leaving the English class because of

reasons related to these issues. Though she had taken the SLS class during the previous term in the summer, she felt comfortable talking to the SLS professor and met with her to discuss what had happened. The professor advised her on what to do, and she stayed in her English class. A number of students reported that they know of instances where SLS instructors had provided specific individuals with information that they used to get assistance, even with problems had nothing to do with the college. A few students noted that their instructor who brought in someone to talk about resources that were available in the community, including a number to call and get free help if they or someone they knew were thinking about committing suicide.

Based on their comments, participants valued the opportunity to discuss and get information about life skills issues. Most agreed that the SLS class was a place where they felt comfortable discussing these issues and believed that the SLS professors really cared about them. While participants noted in their focus group discussion that they realized that the primary function of the SLS course was not to provide such assistance, they valued the discussions that took place in class and the visitors that were invited to discuss those issues. One student summed his experiences up in the following comment, “The inspiration I receive every week from my SLS professor is the only reason why I am still in college. It is like coming to class to get a motivation fix.”

Maslow (1943, 1954) had proposed that an individual’s motivation was dependent upon where that individual found him or herself on a hierarchy of needs. Knowles (1970) had examined the needs of adult learners, and Tinto (1987) had researched the issue of student retention in his study of integrating students into institutions of higher learning.

Elements of the theories of these researchers could explain why participants believed the SLS course had an impact on their decisions and performance. In short, as I continued to develop the case description during Stage II of the study, I sought to connect each of these themes with elements of the following theories: Knowles (1970) theory of adult learning, Tinto's theory of departure, and Maslow's theory of motivation (see Figure 8).

Relationship to Theory

The review of the literature indicated that the student success and retention were affected by psychological factors, social factors, and pedagogical factors (Goldrick-Rab & Han, 2010; O'Gara et al., 2009; Tinto, 1987; Yorke & Longren, 2004). Tinto (1993), in discussing the role institutions play in the success and retention of their students, suggested the following "five broad categories of action: transition assistance, early contact and community building, academic involvement and support, monitoring and early warning, and counseling and advising" (p. 163). These actions serve to assist students with transitioning and integrating into the institution. Because of its role in providing information to students, assisting them in building relationships within the college, getting them involved academically, and providing them access to advisors and other resource personnel, the SLS program appeared to be a mechanism that addressed the issue of the academic and social integration of students. The three themes, the need for information, the desire for advising and mentoring, and the need to address life skills issues speak to these actions proposed by Tinto (1987, 1993). At the same time, each addressed the concepts of the learner's need to know, the self-concept of the learner, the learner's readiness to learn, the learner's motivation to learn, and the learner's orientation

to learning, principles associated with the theory of adult learning (Knowles, 1970), as well as that of participants' safety needs, social needs, and self esteem needs, concepts associated with the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943, 1954).

In a study of student success courses, O'Gara et al. (2009) noted that student services could be seen as a compensatory intervention considering that such services assisted "disadvantaged students overcome their potential lack of information, cultural capital, or academic preparedness" (p. 196). In a sense, because of the themes covered in the classes, the SLS program could be seen as supplementing or even fulfilling an important student services function within the college. Tinto (1993) referred to this phenomenon as colleges being "systematic enterprises comprised of a variety of linking interactive, reciprocal parts, formal and informal, academic and social" (p. 118).

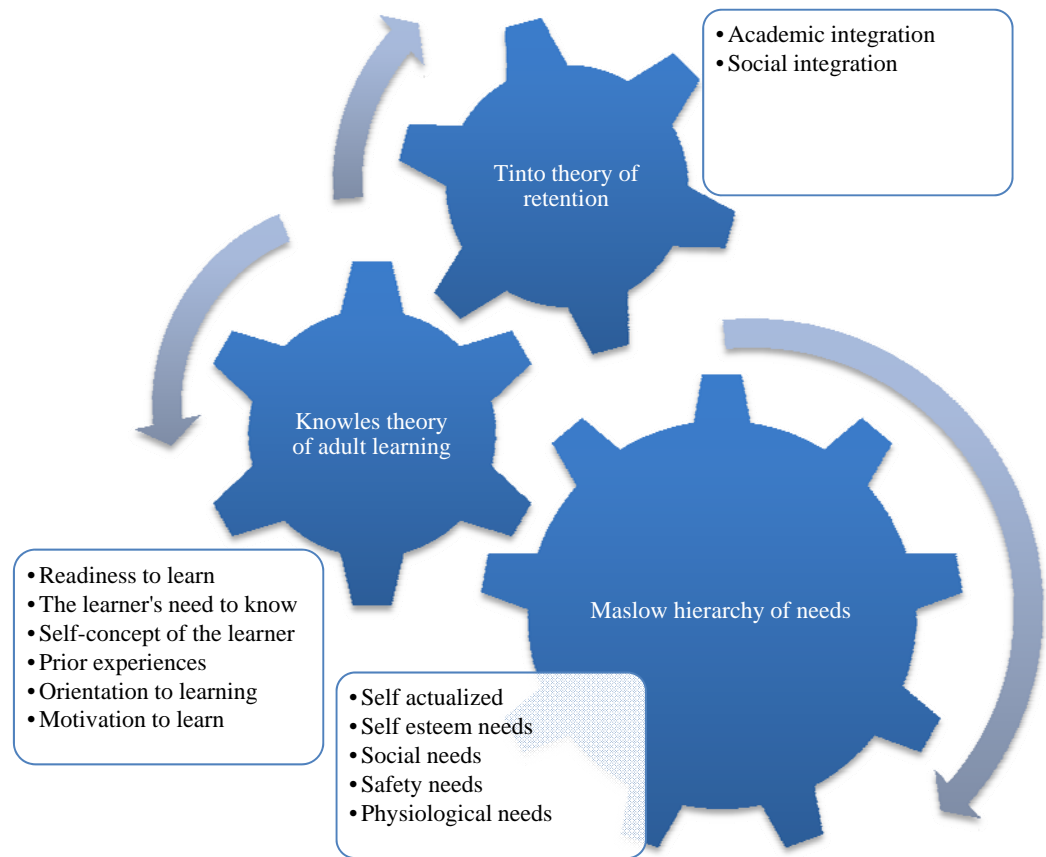


Figure 8. The interaction of elements of Tinto's, Knowles's, and Maslow's theories

Elements of one theory interact with those of the others (see Figure 8). When, for instance, students are asked to work in a group, they tend to be a bit apprehensive of the process and of each other. Some wonder whether it will be safe to express their opinions. Others wonder about the amount of work that each will contribute or how points will be assigned. When students receive information about how groups work, how each member is expected to behave, how each member must contribute, and how the activity will be graded, students feel safe, and the level of anxiety is reduced. Students are then motivated to move up the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1970) and begin work at the social

level. According to Knowles theory of adult learning (1970), because they received information, students are more likely to learn.

Conclusion

Students attending FSCJ Kent Campus for the first time, especially students in the developmental program, face a major obstacle: Most are not accustomed to being in an institution of higher education. Many do not know what to expect, are not familiar with the policies and processes, and have no or very limited knowledge of the resources available. Because of this, students frequently do not complete their courses. Even when they do pass the course, many do not enroll into the following course. In his theory of departure, Tinto (1987, 1993) suggested that the reason for this phenomenon was that educational institutions were not very successful in providing students with mechanisms for transitioning and integrating themselves into the institutions. At FSCJ, one such mechanism was the SLS program. The objective of the program was to increase student success rates and retention rates by having students who tested into the college's developmental program take an SLS course. I, because of my knowledge of the field, was able to analyze the data collected during the study by developing what Yin (2009) referred to as a case description, which entailed "developing a descriptive framework for organizing the case study" (p. 131). I then described the case by using an analytic technique called *explanation building* (Yin, 2009, p. 141).

During Stage I of this mixed methods case study, I examined quantitative data at FSCJ Kent Campus from Fall 2008 to Summer 2010 to determine the impact of the SLS program on student success and retention rates. Because of the number of students in the

sample, the results were not conclusive: I could not determine from the data whether the SLS program impacted students' success and retention rates. However, during Stage II, the qualitative component of the study, I found that participants believed that the SLS program had a great impact on their success and on their decision to remain at the college and enroll in the following course, ENC 1101.

During Stage II of the study, qualitative data collected from participants in the surveys and focus groups led to the following three themes: the need for information; the desire for advising and mentoring; and the need to address life skills issues. Following Yin's advice to connect the themes to some significant theoretical propositions found in the literature, I then looked at these through elements of Knowles theory of adult learning (1970), Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943, 1954), and Tinto's theory of departure (1987, 1993).

An analysis of these data indicated that participants believed that the course was very useful in helping them find out about the college, higher education, and being a student. Additionally, many spoke very highly about the mentoring relationship that they developed with their instructors. The resources that were available for academic support were also mentioned as important. Perhaps the most important aspect of the course, however, was the information related to academic skills and personal skills. Many students noted that the SLS course was the first place where they explored topics such as study skills, time management, conflict resolution, and finances. Students repeatedly stated that they valued the help they received both in academic and non-academic areas.

Just as it was with FTIC students taking college credit courses, students taking courses in developmental education faced serious challenges transitioning and integrating into institutions of higher education. The result was that students either did not complete their courses or did not continue with their studies. The SLS program provided a mechanism to transition and integrate students into the institution and greatly reduced the anxiety associated with attending an institution of higher education, especially for the FTIC students. As I have analyzed the data in this case study, I have gained a deeper understanding of students' experiences in the SLS classes, their perceptions of the SLS program, and their belief of how the course impacted their success and their decision to continue taking courses at the college.

I will now provide in Chapter 5 a summary of the analysis and the conclusions that I have drawn based on the insight that I gained from the analysis. In addition, I will also make a number of recommendations for practice and for future research.

CHAPTER 5 – SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the last half-century, educational leaders have wrestled with the issue of low student success rates and high attrition rates in developmental education courses (Barbatis, 2010; Collins, 2010, Goldrick-Rab & Han, 2010; O'Gara et al., 2009; Tinto, 1987; Yorke & Longren, 2004). In order to address the issue at FSCJ, leaders implemented a policy in Fall 2009 that required any student who tested into one or more developmental courses to take an SLS course. The objective was to increase the success and retention rates of students by exposing them to a series of topics that administrators and faculty thought would increase student performance. This study was a descriptive mixed-methods case study designed to answer the following three research questions: 1) Did the SLS initiative have an impact on retention and student success rates? 2) What reasons did students in developmental English give for the impact or lack of impact? and 3) What elements of the SLS course were most and least valued by students taking developmental English courses? In this chapter, I will provide a summary of the research, discuss the results of the analysis of data, and make a number of recommendations.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because describing the impact that SLS classes had on the retention and success rates of students in developmental English classes at FSCJ Kent Campus and explaining the reason the SLS classes were having that impact could affect the way leaders at FSCJ and at other educational institutions approach the SLS program,

the developmental English program, and all other developmental programs. In addition, the findings support recommendations to provide students in developmental courses with an SLS or similar course (FDOE, 2005). Finally, based on the analysis of the data collected from participants, the SLS course may well be an excellent strategy for educators at FSCJ, as well as across the nation, to use as they address the issue of transitioning and integrating students into their institutions.

Summary of Study

This descriptive mixed-methods case study was conducted at FSCJ-Kent Campus in two stages. Stage I consisted of a review of archival data provided to me by FSCJ's Office of Student Analytics (FSCJ, 2011). Stage II consisted of a qualitative phase during which I conducted a narrative survey and two focus groups. A total of 100 students participated in the study, 79 in the survey and 21 in the focus groups. In analyzing and describing the data, I used a strategy proposed by Yin (2009) called *developing a case description* (p. 131). I did so by building an explanation of the case, a technique that Yin suggested using when the case being studied does not conform to any one specific theory (p. 141). In addition to using the strategy and technique proposed by Yin throughout the study, I also followed Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) procedure for coding data manually during the analysis of the qualitative data. Using each student's ideas as the unit of analysis, I organized the comments into topics; then, I created themes that encompassed the topics. After doing so, I followed yet another of Yin's suggestions, that of relying on theoretical propositions (p. 130), and looked at each of the three themes through a theoretical lens that I created using elements of the theories of Maslow (1954),

Knowles (1970), and Tinto (1987, 1993). Upon concluding the study, I determined that while the evidence that the SLS program impacted student success and retention rates in the developmental English program at FSCJ-Kent Campus, the research site of the study, proved to be inconclusive, a very important benefit of the program was its impact on transitioning and integrating students into the institution.

Summary of Results of Stage I

Stage I of the study was the quantitative phase of the study. During this phase of the study, I reviewed quantitative data that was provided to me about student success and retention rates at FSCJ-Kent Campus from the Fall 2008 to the Summer 2010 semesters, a period of six semesters that I had selected to get a picture of the impact the SLS program had had on student success and retention rates in the developmental English program.

A number of researchers (FDOE, 2006; O’Gara et al., 2009; Zeidenberg et al., 2007) had addressed the issue of whether or not students who participated in the SLS program were retained longer and experienced higher success rates, and they had concluded that the impact was positive. However, after reviewing the information provided by FSCJ Office of Student Analytics (2011), I determined that the data did not provide conclusive evidence of whether the SLS program had a positive or negative impact on the success and retention rates of students taking courses in developmental English at FSCJ Kent Campus. This was because of a number of factors regarding the sample that could not be controlled. First, the semesters had already passed, so there was no way to recapture the students involved and get pertinent data regarding their past

academic behaviors. Second, during the 2008-2009 academic term, a large number of students took only the developmental English course. However, some may have taken an SLS course or a course with similar content prior to taking the English course, and, once again, there had not been a mechanism in place to track these differences. Finally, after the policy was implemented in Fall 2009 that all students who tested into any developmental course would be required to take the SLS course, the number of students who took only the English course (who had received exemptions because of mitigating circumstance) became so small that a comparison was no longer valid. Therefore, while anecdotally (as will be seen during the summary of Stage II of the study) the SLS program did contribute to the success and retention rates of students in the developmental English program, there was not quantitative evidence to support this claim.

Summary of Results of Stage II

Stage II of the study was the qualitative phase of the mixed methods study. This phase of the study was organized around the following three themes: The need for information; the desire for advising and mentoring; and the need to address life skills issues. Based on the data collected, students believed that the SLS program had quite an impact on them. Many reported that they attributed their success in the English course to the SLS course, and a few commented that the SLS course had been a factor in their decision to take the ENC 1101 course, the first college credit course that all students are required to take, directly after they had taken the developmental English course.

Researchers such as Tinto (1987, 1993) had pointed out that a major challenge in dealing with student success and retention issues continued to be that of integrating and

transitioning students into institutions of higher learning. Perhaps the most important finding was that the SLS program serves as a mechanism to transition and integrate students into the institution. College leaders, policy makers, and anyone else concerned about student success and retention issues should find this study helpful as they evaluate the role a Student Life Skills course plays in a student's academic experience, specifically for students taking developmental English courses.

Discussion

In the section that follows, I will discuss the findings and the implications of the findings. I will address the challenges of dealing with data, conveying information to students, advising and mentoring, and providing enhanced counseling services to students.

Addressing the Difficulty of Tracking the Impact of Policy Changes Through Institutional Data

Based on my experiences in collecting and analyzing data, I have concluded that it is extremely important to address the issue of institutional data. To understand what works and what does not, it is important for researchers to collect quality data about students. These data should take into account as many variables as possible to give educators as complete a picture as possible of the impact initiatives have on students.

One challenge I faced in collecting and analyzing the quantitative data was that there were many factors that affected students' success and retention that were not reflected in the data. For instance, during 2003-2008, FSCJ was pursuing a Quality Enhancement Plan designed to address concerns with its FTIC students, most notably the

students in its developmental programs (FCCJ, 2004b). Originally, the institution had identified 145 initiatives, and these were ultimately reduced to 45. Therefore, at any given time, there were multiple initiatives affecting students and their performance. In addition, because of the desire to meet the needs of each student at a personal level, leaders at the institution encouraged faculty and staff to review each student's situation and make accommodations as the situation warranted (Green, 2009, personal communication). These accommodations at times included exempting a small group of students from the SLS requirement. I have referred to FSCJ as a living laboratory; as such, it is an environment in which unexpected factors can affect students' performance.

Leaders at FSCJ have taken an important step in addressing issues related to institutional data. During the 2003-2008 QEP, the need for quality data became evident and was made an institutional priority. The director and the staff of the Office of Student Analytics redesigned the data collecting and tracking system. Part of this process was to gather information from college personnel regarding their data needs. Among the initiatives that emerged was the creation of an information system that allowed administrators, faculty, and staff to track students using an electronic database. However, there are still gaps in the system. For instance, I could not find, without the assistance of the Office of Student Analytics, the number of students who were taking SLS and developmental English courses at the same time, and this is information that can be helpful to educators and, therefore, should be readily accessible.

As a result of my experiences, I have concluded that educators need to continue to work on addressing the difficulty of collecting, tracking, and sharing institutional data. In

addition to their needs for quality data, educators also need to address students' need for information.

Addressing the Need for Information

The data indicated that information about the institution was important to students and that much of it was available to students on websites and in handbooks; however, despite the availability of information, students reported that there was still much they had not known about FSCJ before taking the SLS class. Participants reported a need for information about processes and procedures, especially as it pertained to the institution and to higher education in general, and indicated that they did not understand many aspects of higher education. Some, for instance, had received assistance in signing up for classes from family or friends and did not quite understand the registration process. Others did not know that they could have withdrawn from a class if they did not feel comfortable and receive a full refund if they completed the process before a specific date. According to participants, these processes were explained during the orientation that all students were required to attend; however, based on participants' comments, I concluded that it was not only the availability of information that mattered. The way students received the information played a key role in the process, and participants believed the SLS classes had an impact on their college experience because of the way the information was conveyed.

The professors in SLS classes did not, in most instances, just passively give information to students. In many SLS classes, there were activities associated with the visit. For instance, when an instructor invited an advisor to visit the SLS class, some type

of follow-up activity would occur. Students would take notes and ask questions, discuss the information they had heard with each other, and then have reading and/or writing activities. These types of activities served to assist students in understanding the material that was presented.

In addition to wanting information about the college, participants also reported the need for information about academic procedures and processes such as teaching methods, learning styles, learning resources, and technology. Some participants noted that the SLS class was the first place and time that someone had ever discussed such topics with them. Some felt that understanding a concept such as *academic freedom* and learning that it was common for professors to have different teaching styles prevented them from having problems in their developmental classes, as they realized that different behaviors were to be expected from professors. Many participants reported that they had been unaware of the learning resources that were available, including the tutoring services and other support materials. In the SLS class, they not only heard of these resources but participated in activities designed to encourage them to use and gain familiarity with these resources. Finally, a few participants reported the need for information related to the technology that was available. Some noted concerns using the college's information portal and not knowing where to go for assistance. These concerns were all addressed, according to participants, by the professors in the SLS class, and the problems they had encountered turned out to be relatively simple to solve once they had received the appropriate guidance.

Addressing the Need for Advising and Mentoring

I also concluded that the SLS experience was valuable because it provided participants with a framework for interacting with college personnel. There were many advisors available at FSCJ Kent Campus, and participants reported having good experiences during their interactions with these advisors. However, many did not quite understand ways to initiate the process of visiting an advisor and did not meet with an advisor to discuss academic or financial aid issues until some event made it mandatory for them to do so. In addition to meeting with an advisor to discuss academic planning and financial aid processes, participants also expressed a desire for information about careers, courses, and programs at the college. Most participants reported that their SLS professors were aware of these needs and invited college personnel, such as advisors, faculty members, and administrators, to visit the classes and either introduce themselves or make presentations to the students in the classes about these topics, thereby addressing the students' desire for advising. According to participants, many had taken the opportunity to interact with an advisor or other key college personnel after those people had visited their SLS class.

Likewise, participants reported that they came to see their professors who taught SLS courses as mentors and relied on them for advice. Although I was unable to find a study that specifically explored the mentoring role of SLS instructors, I did find that leaders at FSCJ - Downtown Campus had piloted a mentoring program as a part of its QEP program (FCCJ 2005c) during the 2004-2005 fall and spring semesters. Data from that program indicated that the mentored students had achieved a successful completion rate of 62.5% compared to a completion rate of 48.9 % for the students who were not

mentored during the time period of the study, a gain of 27.8 points. Overall, students who had participated in that program reported that they valued their faculty mentors. They reported that faculty knew them better and were familiar with their unique situation and capabilities; therefore, their faculty mentors were able to provide them with more individualized advisement. The mentors themselves who participated in the program agreed that faculty should play a greater role in advisement and placement. More importantly, students who participated in that study noted that their first experiences tended to be overwhelming, and they appreciated having someone who could anticipate the questions they did not know how to ask.

Based on participants' comments, I concluded that the advising that they received played a great role in assisting them to transition into the institution, and the SLS program facilitated the interaction between advisors and participants.

Addressing the Need to Address Life Skills Issues

Students' academic performance was frequently affected by life issues traditionally not considered a part of the academic program. However, these issues were so important that educators could not ignore them and the way they affected students. For instance, when students suddenly became ill, attendance policies affected their performance and caused them to withdraw or fail a course because of non-attendance. While students could appeal grades after the fact, many did not and just stopped attending class. Students also noted that time management, organization, self reflection, conflict resolution, and money management were issues they grappled with constantly, and they were happy that these topics were addressed in the SLS classes. I concluded that

providing support services to students to help them deal with these life skills issues was essential to their well being.

Limitations of the Study

This study was a case study of FSCJ-Kent Campus. As such, one limitation was that I was using only one campus of a multi-campus institution as the research site. Although I took the position that students attending FSCJ-Kent Campus were representative of students across the college in terms of their performance on FSCJ's English exit tests, this study was still only one look the SLS program from the perspective of one researcher. In addition, the institutional data were not perfect as I was relying on students to be candid and insightful. Therefore, though I was acquiring meaningful insights into the perspectives of participants, I was aware that those perspectives reflected the experiences and biases of those participants. Despite this phenomenon, different researchers who conduct similar studies should get similar reactions from different groups of participants.

I also did not look at characteristics such as race and ethnicity, the experiences of full-time vs. part-time students, nor socioeconomic status because of the lack of reliable data regarding characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. An additional limitation was the time frame that I had to use for the quantitative stage of the study, from fall 2008 to summer 2010. I would have liked to be able to use a longer time frame; however, I could not do so because changes in the program that were in effect before and after this time period would have affected the data.

One aspect of the study that I could not look at was the impact of the SLS program on students with disabilities. While I believed, based on the comments of participants that the SLS classes had a positive impact on their performance, that students with disabilities also received much value from the course, I did not receive any data that confirmed my belief. In addition, I also suspected that the SLS classes affected students in the ESL (English as a Second Language) program in a positive way, yet had no data to support that belief. Despite these limitations, I found that the study still yielded valuable information that can be useful to educators. As a result, I now present the following recommendations for practice and for future research.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the results of the study, I would like to make the following recommendations for practice.

First, because of the difficulty of acquiring and tracking data, I recommend that educators address the difficulty of collecting, tracking, and sharing institutional data. Educators should recognize that data are a resource, and they should make leaders aware of data needs as soon as those needs emerge. Educators should put strategies in place to collect as much data about students as possible and track those data to see the way different initiatives affect students. Educators should assist the leaders at their institutions by making them aware of the variables that should be taken into account when dealing with students, faculty, programs, and initiatives. Using FSCJ to illustrate, I would like to explain ways this recommendation might be initiated. Educators at FSCJ should let the Office of Student Analytics know of data needs as soon as those needs

emerge. At the same time, these educators should also assist the staff at the Office of Student Analytics by making them aware of the variables that should be taken into account when dealing with individual students, faculty, programs, and initiatives. If these recommendations are followed, then it may become necessary to add to the staff of that department or to acquire additional technology. I recommend that leaders at the institution provide the Office of Student Analytics with the technology and staff to assist with data collection and analysis.

Most participants agreed that the primary benefit of the SLS course was the acquisition of information. It appeared that students, especially those FTIC students who did not know anyone who had been in college, knew very little about the college and about being a student. As a result of the analysis of data, I see the need for a system of information sharing that involves more than one teaching and learning modality. I recommend that educators attempt to convey information about their institutions and programs to students in an active manner, using different modalities of teaching and addressing the different learning styles of their students. For instance, in addition to providing information on the college's website, educators should pursue other strategies to assist students with understanding information about the college. College personnel who are responsible for courses and programs may be able to communicate aspects of their programs to students and the public via video clips, podcasts, and similar mechanisms. Something to this effect is currently being done at FSCJ- Kent Campus in the Student Activities Office (Kelly Warren, personal communication, 2012). Staff members in that office use Facebook to share information with students. I recommend

that college leaders build on and expand such efforts. Finally, I recommend instituting a highly interactive forum in which students can discuss information with other students, and with administrators, faculty, and staff at the college they are attending. This activity may take the form of once a month meetings (e.g., face-to-face, Skype, webinars) to discuss information about their specific college and its processes.

Leaders should explore the option of using college personnel as assigned mentors. The SLS instructors facilitated the interaction between students and advisors and other college personnel by encouraging college personnel to visit the SLS classrooms. Frequently, such visits led to very close working relationships between participants and the visitors. Based on the comments of participants, it appears that many college personnel are willing to assist students when called upon to do so.

I recommend that professors incorporate SLS type activities into their classes when possible. Of course, I am aware that because of the demands upon class time for instruction directly related to content, it may be difficult to implement this recommendation. However, I do feel that if such activities can be incorporated into even one lesson, the benefits to students will be so great that it will be a worthwhile endeavor. Faculty teaching developmental English or reading courses, for example, should explore creating assignments that include visits to such places as the learning center or the student success office.

Though most institutions provide some form of personal counseling to students, I recommend that educators continue to review the needs of their students and explore options to provide additional support mechanisms when possible to assist students with

life skills issues, such as enhanced services to deal with the loss of a loved one or a child who is diagnosed with a serious condition. For instance, the leadership at FSCJ identified a need to provide more in-depth services to students to assist them to deal with life issues. Starting in the fall of 2011, in addition to the counseling services provided at the college, leaders at the institution decided to provide students enhanced counseling services via The Student Assistance Program (FSCJ, 2012). I recommend that leaders everywhere support such initiatives.

Finally, given the importance that participants have indicated the SLS program plays in conveying information to them, educators should make students aware of the SLS course and encourage them to take it.

Recommendations for Future Research

Concerns about data have been voiced for over half a century (see Roueuche & Hurlburt, 1968;) and continue to pose a serious challenge to educators (Boylan & Saxon, 2010). I recommend that educators continue to research ways to collect, analyze, and share data in order to create a culture in higher education of data driven decision making. Because educators continue to deal with limited resources, it is imperative that these resources are used wisely. Conducting research on the impact of initiatives is one way that this can be accomplished, and educators must explore mechanisms and strategies to ensure that personnel have access to quality data. There are already major initiatives underway that speak to this issue. One of the goals of the *Achieving the Dream Initiative* (2010), for instance, is to encourage participating educators to develop and implement

programs based on data. I support this approach to decision making and recommend that educators continue to research ways to collect, analyze, and share data.

As leaders invest resources in programs designed to address transitioning and integrating students in their institutions, it becomes important to assess the effectiveness of these programs. I recommend that educators research the impact of programs designed to address transitioning and integrating students in their institutions. Furthermore, because different programs are comprised of different parts, I recommend that educators assess the effectiveness of individual parts of programs when possible.

I also recommend that more research be conducted on the impact of SLS courses on student success and retention. For instance, a future researcher can perhaps look at the effectiveness of the entire program at a specific college or at the impact of the SLS program on specific populations of students, such as the students taking courses in developmental mathematics or students taking the first college credit English course at institutions.

If the recommendation to infuse elements of the SLS course into specific discipline courses is followed, research should be conducted on the effectiveness of those components of the courses.

In addition, I would like to recommend that research be conducted on the costs-benefits of the SLS program. I was not able to look at the costs of the program to the students and the institution; however, I believe that such an analysis would add to the literature and to our understanding of whether institutions should, in fact, offer these courses.

Finally, having conducted a mixed-methods study, I experienced first-hand the benefits of looking at both quantitative and qualitative data. Therefore, I recommend that future researchers collect both quantitative as well as qualitative data when appropriate as each provides a part of the larger picture.

These recommendations for future research are important because such research will fill the need to assess important aspects of a college's program. As decision makers continue to request information about programs to allocate funds and to provide other support, and as educators themselves continue to focus on pursuing initiatives and creating programs to ensure successful outcomes for students, it becomes imperative to have data on the effectiveness of such initiatives and programs. As the following conclusion will indicate, this study is intended to be a part of that body of research that will add to this literature.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods case study of the SLS program at FSCJ-Kent Campus addressed the issue of whether or not the program made a difference in the retention and success rates of students taking developmental English. In Chapter 5, I provided a summary of each of the stages of the study. The analysis of the quantitative data indicated that the evidence of whether the SLS program affected students' success and student retention in developmental English in a positive manner was inconclusive. However, the analysis of the qualitative data indicated that participants in the study believed that the SLS program contributed to their success and would influence their decisions to take additional courses. In addition to providing a summary of the findings

in Chapter 5, I also discussed a number of conclusions I reached. These, in turn, lead me to make a number of recommendations for practice and for future research.

Participants believed that the course made a difference in not only their academic performance, but also in their lives. The data indicated that participants felt this way because the SLS experience became an important mechanism for them as they transitioned and integrated themselves into the institution. Educators should find this study helpful as they evaluate the role Student Life Skills courses play in a student's academic experience.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter from Dr. Cabral Maly



June 1, 2011

Dear Richard,

The purpose of this letter is to grant Richard Greene, a doctoral student in the Doctoral of Educational Leadership Program at the University of North Florida, permission to conduct research at Florida State College (FSCJ). Richard's doctoral study, entitled *Promoting Success in Developmental English: Student Life Skills Courses* is a case study of how educators at FSCJ assist first-time in college students with transition and integration into the institution. This study will be conducted at FSCJ's Kent Campus during July 2011 and December 2011.

I, Dr. Cabral-Maly, President, do hereby grant permission for Richard Greene to conduct his doctoral study at FSCJ's Kent Campus. In addition to obtaining this site permission letter, Richard will need to apply for IRB approval of his proposal from his treatise committee and the University of North Florida's IRB. After that approval has been received, Richard may request an IRB approval from FSCJ IRB board to conduct the data collection on our campus.

Respectfully,

Dr. Cabral-Maly

Cc: Dr. Phyl Renninger, FSCJ Human Subjects Administrator
Dr. Kathe Kasten
University of North Florida
College of Education

1 UNF Drive
Jacksonville, FL 32224

Appendix B

Letter to Instructor Requesting Access

Dear ,

My name is Richard Greene, and I am a student in the doctoral program in educational leadership in the College of Education and Human Services at the University of North Florida. I would like to request your assistance in the research for my doctoral dissertation at the University of North Florida titled *Promoting Success in Developmental English: Student Life Skills Courses*. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the SLS program on student retention and student success rates in developmental English classes. Your participation is voluntary and refusal to participate will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits. Participation will include allowing your students to complete a survey.

I am requesting about 30 minutes of your class time in ENC0021 Reference #. I am also requesting permission for a follow-up visit of about 30 minutes during the following week of class. When I arrive at your classroom during the first visit, I would like you to introduce me as a student in the doctoral program in educational leadership at the University of North Florida and then leave the room for about 30 minutes. I will then explain the survey to your students and invite them to participate. A copy of the Invitation to Participate in the Narrative Survey and the survey instrument are attached (Appendices C and E). I will ask students not to give the completed survey to you; instead, I will ask them to place the completed survey in a locked box that I will bring to the class the following week when I return. During this return visit, both you and I will leave the classroom while students place the survey in the box. I will then return, tell students that they may still turn in their surveys by going to F112 and placing in the secure box that I will leave there, tell them about the focus group meeting, and invite each student to volunteer to participate in the focus group meeting. I will give each person an Invitation and Informed Consent Form to Participate in the Focus Group. Each student can notify me of his or her desire to participate by writing his or her email address down on a sheet of paper and giving that to me or by emailing me of his/her intent to participate. I will then notify each person via email of the time, date and place of each meeting. Despite notifying me of their intent to volunteer by providing me with their email address, I will inform the students that they may still withdraw should they decide not to participate.

Please note that there are no foreseeable risks to participants. In terms of benefits to participation, individual participants may not benefit directly; however, the research may affect the way colleges teach developmental English, so participants will be making a contribution to the field of developmental education. Individual participants will not be compensated. Your identity will be protected as no names, social security numbers,

course reference numbers, or any other information that could reveal the identity of students or instructors will be collected during the survey phase of the study. In addition, all research materials such as the completed surveys will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office at FSCJ, Kent Campus, a secure location. While I will collect the email address of each student who volunteer to participate for communication purposes and a signed informed consent form from each person who participates, each participant will be assigned a fictitious name that will be used in the transcribed data. I will store the list that connects participants' name to the fictitious names in a separate, secure location.

If you are willing to assist me, please respond to this email and let me know an appropriate date and time when I can come to your class to speak to your students and distribute the information packet. Please feel free to call me with any questions at . I wish to thank you for giving my request your consideration.

Sincerely,

Richard Greene

Principal Investigator

Appendix C

The University of North Florida Invitation to Participate in the Narrative Survey

Dear Student:

My name is Richard Greene, and I am a student in the doctoral program in educational leadership in the College of Education and Human Services at the University of North Florida. I would like to invite you to participate in the research for my doctoral dissertation at the University of North Florida titled *Promoting Success in Developmental English: Student Life Skills Courses*. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the SLS class on student retention and success rates. This study is significant in that it may affect the way educators teach developmental English and deal with students in developmental programs. Because of this, while there is no monetary compensation that will be awarded to you, students in developmental programs everywhere may benefit from the data you provide.

Participation in this research study will include the completion of a survey in the privacy of your home or office during Fall 2011. I have come to your class to explain the survey, address any concerns that that you might have, and invite you to participate. I have brought this letter and a copy of the survey. I will leave this information with you, and you are invited to take it home and complete the survey if you wish to do so. Please do not give the completed survey to your instructor. Instead, I will return next week and provide you with a locked box in which you should place the completed survey. If you prefer, you may also go to F112 at FSCJ, Kent Campus, and place the completed survey in the locked box that I will leave there with Ms. Bev McKay, our Senior Instructional Support Specialist. I am the only one who will have access to the completed survey, and I will store these in a locked cabinet in my office at FSCJ.

Please note that while there are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study, your participation is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. In addition, if you volunteer to participate but change your mind about participating, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. You will be able to the survey anonymously as no names, social security numbers, or any other information that could reveal your identity will be collected.

Please feel free to call me at _____ if you have any questions about the research. For questions regarding the rights of research participants, you may also call Dr. Kathe Kasten, UNF Institutional Review Board Representative, at _____.
Thank you very much for your participation!

Please complete the survey if you are willing to participate in the research study outlined above. By completing this survey, you are certifying that you are 18 years of age or older and that you are giving your informed consent to participate in this study.

Sincerely,
Richard Greene – Principal Investigator

Appendix D

The University of North Florida Invitation and Informed Consent Form to Participate in the Focus Group

Dear Student:

My name is Richard Greene, and I am a student in the doctoral program in educational leadership in the College of Education and Human Services at the University of North Florida. I would like to invite you to participate in the research for my doctoral dissertation at the University of North Florida titled *Promoting Success in Developmental English: Student Life Skills Courses*. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the SLS class on student retention and success rates. This study is significant in that it may affect the way educators teach developmental English and deal with students in developmental programs. Because of this, while there is no monetary compensation that will be awarded to you, students in developmental programs everywhere may benefit from the data you provide.

Your participation in this research study will include being in a focus group of approximately 10 students who will meet with me in F112 during Fall 2011 for approximately 60 to 75 minutes. Members of the group will give me their perspectives on the SLS program, discuss whether or not it has helped them, and, if it has helped them, discuss the ways it has helped them in their developmental English courses.

When we meet, before we begin the focus group interview/discussion, I will provide additional details about focus groups and discuss the procedures that we will follow. At that time, I will address any concerns that that you might have and invite you once again to participate in the focus group. I will record the session on a digital recorder in order to transcribe your comments accurately; however, all information associated with you and your participation will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Names, social security numbers, and student identification numbers will not be collected. As a matter of fact, I will create a fictitious name for you that I will use in the transcription when I record your comments. I will create a list on which I will match your name to the fictitious name assigned to you, and I will keep that list in a secure safe located in the administrative office at the Kent Campus, separate from where the transcribed data will be kept. In addition, I will take great care to ensure that your voice is not made available to others who may wish to trace comments back to you. To this end, the digital files will be stored on a password protected flash drive in a locked cabinet in my office at FSCJ, Kent Campus, during the transcription process and deleted after the transcription process is completed. All transcribed materials will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office at FSCJ, Kent Campus, and only members of my dissertation committee will have access to the transcriptions.

Please note that while there are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study, your participation is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. In addition, if you volunteer to participate but change your mind about participating, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty or loss of benefits.

Please feel free to call me at _____ if you have any questions about the research. For questions regarding the rights of research participants, you may also call Dr. Kathe Kasten, UNF Institutional Review Board Representative, at _____.
Thank you very much for your participation!

Sincerely,

Richard Greene

Please sign below if you are willing to participate in the research study outlined above. By signing this form, you are certifying that you are 18 years of age or older and that you are giving your informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature _____
Printed name _____ Date _____
Email _____

Principal Investigator Richard Greene
Signature _____ Date _____

- 5) How did the course impact your performance in your developmental English course?
- 6) How did the course materials help you in your developmental English course?
- 7) Did the lesson on available resources help you in your developmental English course? How?
- 8) What suggestions do you have for improving the SLS course?

- 9) Please make any additional comments that you wish to make.

Appendix F

The questions for participants in the focus groups will be driven by the responses to the survey. The questions that are listed below are intended to serve as conversation starters.

Questions for Participants in the Focus Group:

- 1) Would you say that you had a good experience in your SLS class? How so?
- 2) Were there any assignments or activities that you would call your favorite assignments or activities in the course? What was it about the assignment that appealed to you?
- 3) What parts of the course or topics covered were most beneficial to you?
- 4) What parts of the course or topics covered were the least beneficial to you?
- 5) Would you say that the SLS course impacted your performance in your developmental English course? Why? Why not? How?
- 6) How did the SLS course materials help you in your developmental English course? Why do you say so?
- 7) Did the lesson on available resources help you in your developmental English course? How?
- 8) You said, “.... ” Can you elaborate?
- 9) Was there anything else that you observed that you believe might be worth mentioning?
- 10) Would you say that parts of the SLS course can be improved? What suggestions do you have for improving the SLS course?
- 11) Do you think that there are ways the course can be improved to assist students taking developmental English courses?

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